



Occulting the Screen:
A Methodology for Manifesting Agency
Through Performative Animation.

By
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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of Tasmania

October 2017

Declarations

This thesis contains no material, which has been accepted, for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it incorporates no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

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Sally Rees

October 2017

Acknowledgements

This project acknowledges a debt to my family and friends who have been endlessly supportive and eager to assist throughout the course of the research.

Thank you to my supervisors Leigh Hobba, Dr. Mary Scott and Dr. Maria Kunda for their patient support and guidance and wise counsel throughout my candidature. I would particularly like to thank Dr.s Scott and Kunda for coaxing and coaching my articulation of the project.

Thank you to my colleagues, the members of the Higher Degree by Research cohort and academic staff at the Tasmanian College of the Arts who generously contributed feedback and discussion throughout my candidature.

My thanks to Monica Gaby, Felix Ratcliff and Chris Rees for their valuable critique of the content and structure of the exegesis. Thanks also to my editor, Anne Mestitz, for her support, generosity, knowledge and great attention to detail.

My gratitude to the members of The Guðmundsdóttir Coven and those who helped facilitate the many aspects of the *The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning*: Alison Butterworth, Rob O'Connor, Julia Drouhin, Lucy Hawthorne, Sam Johnstone, Kate Kelly, Mish Meijers, Lola Page, Oscar Parsons, Lisa Rime, Elissa Ritson, Josh Santospirito, Pip Stafford, Kim Taylor, Matt Warren, Tricky Walsh and Sarah Wright.

Lastly I offer my deepest gratitude to my partner Matt Warren and my son Arthur Warren for their assistance, patience and inspiration.

Dedication

To my two greatest loves, Matt and Arthur Warren.

Your unfaltering faith in me has carried me through when my own has wavered.

Table of Contents

Declarations	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedication	iv
Table of Contents	v
Table of Figures.....	vii
Abstract.....	x
Introduction	1
The Exegesis	14
Chapter 1: Animation and the force of thought.....	17
1.1 A ritual process	18
1.2 Technique	19
1.3 Neuroplasticity: a register of force	23
1.4 How thought is pictured: a personal catalogue of references	25
1.5 David Lynch's moving paintings.....	37
1.6 Record and construct: rotoscope, overpainting and the layered image	41
Chapter 2: Time, rhythm, pulse and repetition.....	55
2.1 Static image versus motion.....	57
2.2 Labour	58
2.3 Parallellarrhythmia	58
2.4 An Accident.....	61
2.5 Loop: repetition and intent.....	65
2.6 Pulse: the lure of the GIF	67
Chapter 3: Haunt and Hauntology.....	69
3.1 The Surrealist Workshop.....	69
3.2 Derrida's Ghosts: Haunted by Media	71
3.3 Haunting; ghosts made of thought and emotion as force	74

3.4 A laboratory haunting.....	76
3.5 The Medium.....	78
3.6 The Pickup Artists.....	81
3.7 Monsterring.....	98
3.8 Allport: Unhoused.....	109
Chapter 4: Art practice/Magickal practice.....	117
4.1 Magick and Intent	117
4.2 Witchcraft as political practice.....	120
4.3 A political remedy.....	121
4.4 Localised art-witches: a community emerges	123
4.5 Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (W.I.T.C.H.)	125
4.6 The Witch Hat.....	128
4.7 Fastwürms.....	129
4.8 Alan Moore	135
4.9 Winter Incantation	137
4.10 HEX: the construction of curses	138
4.11 Sweet Tribology	143
4.12 The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning.....	144
Conclusion.....	155
Exhibition design	156
The visual thesis.....	158
Appendix II: List of publications during candidature.....	166
Appendix III: TV and Filmography	168
Appendix IV: Timepiece by Anne Morgan	172
Appendix V: Transcription of Annie Geard’s notes on viewing <i>An Accident</i>	174
Bibliography	176

Table of Figures

Figure 1. <i>Blush 2</i> 2009. Wine over inkjet print on Epson watercolour paper	10
Figure 2. <i>Ectoplasmic</i> 2011. Single channel video loop	11
Figure 3. Cover of my own paperback edition of <i>Carrie</i> , New English Library 1981	26
Figure 4. Two images from <i>Thought-Forms</i>	29
Figure 5. Marjorie-Ann Watts, two illustrations from <i>Marianne Dreams</i> 1958.....	34
Figure 6. Still frames from Brakhage's <i>Stellar</i> , 1993. Film.....	35
Figure 7. David Lynch, four phases of <i>Six Men Getting Sick</i> 1967.	38
Figure 8. David Lynch, still frame from <i>The Alphabet</i> 1968. 16mm film.	39
Figure 9. David Lynch, still frame from <i>The Grandmother</i> 1970.	40
Figure 10. Jerry Mouse and Gene Kelly in MGMs <i> Anchors Aweigh</i> 1945.....	43
Figure 11. Still frame from Cab Calloway's performance in <i>Snow White</i> 1933.....	44
Figure 12. Still frames from the 'Fred & Ginger' section of the 'Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds' sequence from <i>Yellow Submarine</i> 1968. United Artists.....	47
Figure 13. David Boeno, Annette Messenger in her Malakoff studio in 1983, 1983.	50
Figure 14. Gerhard Richter, <i>Overpainted photograph 17. Nov. 99</i> , (Circa. 1999)	52
Figure 15. Gerhard Richter, <i>Overpainted photograph 17. February. 92</i> (Circa. 1992) Oil paint on photograph.....	53
Figure 16. Video stills from the two <i>Parallellarrhythmia</i> screens 2013. Dual channel video loops.....	60
Figure 17. Annie Geard, A notebook sketch documenting <i>An Accident</i> 2013.....	64
Figure 18. Final climactic page from the story <i>Skullduggery</i> in <i>Misty</i> No. 18,.....	72
Figure 19. Stills from title sequence to <i>Ace of Wands</i> 1970-72, ITV	73
Figure 20. Stills from title sequence to <i>The Tomorrow People</i> , Thames Television 1973	73
Figure 21. William Hope (1863 – 1933) Man with the spirit of his deceased second wife (L) and Man with a spirit face appearing (R).....	74
Figure 22. Three frames from <i>The Medium</i> 2012, single channel video loop.....	79
Figure 23. Mish Meijers and Sally Rees, <i>Are you there, Neenish?</i> 2014.....	82
Figure 24. Mish Meijers and Sally Rees, <i>The Pickup Artists</i> 2014.	84
Figure 25. <i>Flying Horse Spirit</i> 2013. Single channel video loop	86
Figure 26. <i>Garage Spirit</i> 2014. Single channel video loop.....	87
Figure 27. Digital mockup of <i>Arms for Animating Architecture</i> 2013.....	88
Figure 28. <i>AAA (inverse)</i> 2014. Dual channel video loops, installation view,	89
Figure 29. <i>Summonings (various)</i> 2014. Dual channel video loops, installation view,	90

Figure 30. Composite image of the two screens of <i>Summonings (various)</i> 2014.....	90
Figure 31. <i>Hilltop Spook</i> 2014. Single channel video loop.....	93
Figure 32. Irene Miracle as Rose Elliot in <i>Inferno</i> 1980. Dir. Dario Argento.....	94
Figure 33. <i>Shivers</i> 2014. Chandelier, mirror. Installation view,	95
Figure 34. <i>The Optimist</i> 2015. Single channel video loop.....	100
Figure 35. <i>Grind</i> 2015. Single channel video loop.....	101
Figure 36. Sissy Spacek as the title role in <i>Carrie</i> 1976. Dir. Brian de Palma	102
Figure 37. <i>Zap Zap</i> 2015. Single channel video loop	103
Figure 38. <i>The Telekinete</i> (L) and <i>Second Sight</i> (R) both 2015.	104
Figure 39. <i>Aura (pink)</i> (L) and <i>Aura (yellow)</i> (R) both 2015.	105
Figure 40. Image taken by unknown aura photographer at the Hobart Psychic Expo, circa 2000.....	105
Figure 41. <i>Fury Marsupial</i> 2015. Watercolour over inkjet print, 59.4 x 42 cm.....	106
Figure 42. Image from page 158, Vaughts Practical Character Reader	107
Figure 43. <i>The Eyes We See Ghosts With</i> 2015. Watercolour over inkjet print,.....	108
Figure 44. For Six Weeks I Believed I Had Heard Poor Gordon's Voice (after Mary Morten Allport) 2016.Single channel video loop with mixed media. Photo: Linda Fredheim.	112
Figure 45. Image attributed to Mary Morten Allport, unsigned, undated and untitled,	113
Figure 46. The 'music room' bay of the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Art.	114
Figure 47. A double page spread from my Montreal journal showing planning sketches for the first hex.....	119
Figure 48. Phillipa Stafford, <i>The Stone Mother (Herself)</i> , Flux Project, The Unconformity, 2016.....	124
Figure 49. Lou Conboy, <i>Tasmanian Renaissance Grugetta</i> , 2017. Inkjet print	125
Figure 50. W.I.T.C.H participants protesting outside a Chicago courthouse where a riot conspiracy trial is underway 1969. Image: Lee Balterman/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images	126
Figure 51. Annette Messager <i>Le Chapeau Sorciere</i> 2012. Mixed media	128
Figure 52. Fastwürms <i>House of Bangs</i> 2007 iteration. Installation view, Art Gallery of York University.....	131
Figure 53. Fastwürms <i>Blood and Swash</i> 2007 iteration. Installation view, Art Gallery of York University.....	132
Figure 54. Fastwürms <i>Blood and Swash</i> 2007 iteration. Installation detail, Art Gallery of York University.....	132

Figure 55. Fastwürms Tailgate Party #1: Into the Void 2000.....	133
Figure 56. Fastwürms <i>Telepathacats</i> 2003. Stills from single channel digital video ...	134
Figure 57. Rodney Berry and Sally Rees <i>Winter Incantation</i> 2013. Photo: Jason James	137
Figure 58. Single frame from <i>HEX</i> experiment 1 (unfinished work).....	139
Figure 59. Single frame from <i>HEX</i> experiment 2 (unfinished work).....	139
Figure 60. <i>Sweet Tribology</i> images from left to right: front cover, reverse and picture disc 2015. Vinyl record packaging and picture disc	143
Figure 61. Instagram post of the GS workstation 2016.....	144
Figure 62. <i>Effigy Bjork in Brooklyn Heights, NY</i> 2016 Photo: Rob O’Conner	146
Figure 63. Effigy Bjork atop kunanyi, Hobart 2016	146
Figure 64. <i>The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning</i> 2016. Effigy Bjork installation view, Plimsoll Gallery.....	147
Figure 65. <i>The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning</i> 2016.....	147
Figure 66. Promotional image of Bjork in original Maiko Takeda headpiece 2015.....	148
Figure 67. <i>The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning</i> 2016.....	148
Figure 68. <i>The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning</i> 2016.....	150
Figure 69. <i>The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning</i> 2016.....	151

Abstract

This thesis connects animation to arcane or shamanistic practice, as a speculation upon the effectiveness of moving images as sigils – symbolic representations of desired outcomes. The series of videos are hand-painted rotoscope-style animations applied over photographic video, presented as short loops in the gallery context.

The project builds upon dual traditions, first combined in Surrealism, of politicised esotericism and psychoanalytic theorising of the unconscious. Building on the Surrealist tradition, the thesis incorporates current neuro-scientific knowledge of brain plasticity and references occult imagery to communicate the esoteric and intangible nature of cognition.

The works manifest 'porosity' in their layered and fluid form and position the screen as an agent site; a place of mediation between what is, and what is willed. Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007) defines contemporary, secularised society as a zone of 'buffered' identity as distinct from the more 'porous', enchanted existence of our forebears. This project sought to produce a contemporary porosity, and drew on the films of Stan Brakhage and the early short films of David Lynch, both of whom use the mark of 'the artists hand' as a means to make manifest upon film, what the camera cannot capture. In the manner of Canadian witch artist duo Fastwürms, and the radical, second wave feminist group W.I.T.C.H. (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell), this project employed the promise of occult forces to remediate orthodox social forms.

Themes of disenchantment, disengagement, the Freudian concept of wish-fulfilment and agency were developed in a studio process that harnessed performative and painterly gestures. Unfolding no narrative, the works are neither pictorial nor cinematic. They are both solid (held within a screen) and gossamer (projected light).

The imagery was developed from improvised actions before the camera. The video footage was then transformed through automatist, ritualised overpainting of each frame, which was re-animated to produce a looping, rhythmic effect that operates like a repeating chorus or a mantra. The rhythmic aspect of the works equates to an active hoodoo mechanism: their occulted cycle is completed by an audience invited to enter an uncensored or 'gnostic' state.

The project is invested in experiential, liminal and gnostic states and the pursuit of porosity, those of both maker and viewer. It is performed as a counteractive approach to rationalism and with acknowledgement of female potential and the power of intuitive states to human self-actualisation and consciousness.

The artworks slip between the concrete actualisation of the still image and the temporal state of the moving image. Exhibited according to a spatial logic that lies between 'white cube' and 'black box', the works are activated through concentrated focus, and thus operate according to the logic of sigils: manifestations of wish or intent, strengthened through ritualised acts of will.

Introduction

Almost everyone can agree that one of the big differences between us and our ancestors of five hundred years ago is that they lived in an “enchanted” world, and we do not; at the very least, we live in a much less “enchanted” world. We might think of this as our having “lost” a number of beliefs and the practices which they made possible. But more, the enchanted world was one in which these forces could cross a porous boundary and shape our lives, psychic and physical. One of the big differences between us and them is that we live with a much firmer sense of the boundary between self and other. We are “buffered” selves. We have changed.¹

– Charles Taylor

In his book *A Secular Age*², Charles Taylor identifies a contemporary pop-cultural obsession with the paranormal. He argues that it has yielded the creation and consumption of a wealth of media on the subject of ‘the uncanny,³’ as a nostalgic yearning for the enchanted existence of our ancestors. Taylor’s book distinguishes between the ‘porous’ self of the past, and the ‘buffered’ secular existence that we lead today, and he identifies our obsession and yearning for lost porosity.

As an example, Taylor suggests that in the 1990s this yearning was manifest in the TV show *The X-Files* (amongst others), in which two protagonists, Mulder and Scully were exemplars of ‘porous’ and ‘buffered’ identities, a formula now frequently recycled. FBI Agent Fox Mulder (the porous identity, a role played by David Duchovny) pursues his role guided by his own theories of extra-terrestrial activity (based on a childhood memory of his sister’s abduction) and his willingness to engage with the paranormal.

1. Charles Taylor, ‘Buffered and porous selves’. Posted to the blog *The Immanent Frame*, September 2, 2008.

2. Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

3. That which is uncanny (or *unheimlich*) was identified by Freud as a psychological feeling of unrest that occurs when something is both strange and familiar (rather than simply mysterious). The term is often applied to matters of the occult or paranormal for the manner in which they suggest a co-existent plane of reality alongside our more familiar and corporeal one.

These beliefs earn him the nickname 'Spooky' and lead to a dingy basement office and the derision of his peers. Agent Dana Scully (the buffered identity, played by Gillian Anderson), a scientist and medical doctor, is appointed by the FBI as Mulder's partner with the intent of using her as a watchdog; a known rationalist who will keep 'Spooky' in check.

Much of the tension of the T.V. series however is drawn from the greater complexity of the characters. Mulder, whose search is always ultimately for 'the truth' constantly surprises Scully and others with his, ultimately rational, approaches to seemingly unexplainable subjects and Scully, whose dedication to science is complicated by her deeply religious Catholic background.

Together they model a, rarely stable, human fulcrum that teeters between the buffered and the porous. A Yin/Yang pairing who are constantly shifting in their respective faiths but are both notable for their contemporary engagement with their own porosity in a role (and a society) that privileges the buffered.

An aim of this research project was to engage and reconcile 'lost' or 'neglected' porosity through the development of a methodology for manifesting and actioning the physical properties of thought. I adopted the word 'porous' to describe a modality that is neither fixed, nor retentive; it is uncertain but curious and speculative. This project operates according to this modality and under an optimistic speculation that the re-enchantment of our 'buffered' society could make a valuable contribution to a distinctly Feminist vision of societal well-being. It is driven equally by a deeply felt anguish that our species (and planet) are being stifled by increasingly conservative and rationalist seats of power, and optimism that effective counteractive means can be discovered and undertaken.

Through the research, thought is depicted and considered from a distinctly porous position that balances new (but incomplete) scientific/buffered knowledge and attempts to bridge knowledge gaps by framing thought as an alternative source of productive energy for occult means. I read Taylor's definition of the 'buffered' as a state that privileges rationalism, fact and certainty; I read the 'porous' as a state placing its value upon faith, intuition and energy.⁴

Its pursuit of re-enchantment was conducted in the studio initially in the attempt to answer the question, *what form does the force of thought take?* This question became gradually usurped by a second line of enquiry *how can this 'thought-force' be channelled usefully?*

4. Perhaps that which is described in Asian cultures as 'chi' or 'prana'.

By exploiting a new technique of performative animation, the artworks reference multiple planes of reality simultaneously: the visible as photographic performed video, and the invisible, brought into vision as a constructed, painted image. While relying on the photographic image for its familiar signifier of reality, as a result of incorporating the animated aspect, the screen becomes a container for holding and manifesting agency – an intervention in the world for a desired outcome – in its constructed image. It demarcates an intermediary zone between ‘what is’ and ‘what is willed’, positioning the artist as shaman (someone who acts as an intermediary between the natural and supernatural worlds, using magick to heal and prophesise) or medium.

Stylistically the animated works produced reflect my own and other definitions of porosity, resulting in fluid images in constant motion that refuse to settle in form. I have described the screen as their *container* but this should be emphasised as a membranous one that may take a more or less physical form (as monitor or as projection) and allows for some transfer of their content.

During the process of my studio research my aim became to develop a correlation between the illusory (the screen image) and the construction of something more present, more physical and capable of affecting the world outside the screen. Through this process I became conscious of my desire for there to be magick⁵ in my practice, although in the early stages I felt unable to acknowledge this.

In the studio, a methodology developed which utilised the engaging and emotive animated screen-image for the translation of neurotransmission into an externalised force, and a consideration of that force's power and application through ritualised and magickally purposed art making. Hand-painted, watercolour animation was developed as a visual metaphor for thought and emotion. The intention was to enact an embodied, performative means to create catharsis or cleansing and as aspirational charm.

5. 'Magic' is defined by the Oxford dictionary as the power of apparently influencing events by using mysterious or supernatural forces. I use the early English spelling of the word 'magick' as revived by Aleister Crowley in the Victorian era to distinguish it from the theatrical work of a conjurer or illusionist.

The imagery equates neuroplasticity and cognitive processes with other physical forces, such as electrical charges or gaseous clouds. I used an automatist painting technique⁶ to create the substance of (and conduit for) this force, which, when animated, acts as a kind of 'sigil' – a magickally charged symbol – to carry forth the desired effect: internal catharsis or as an external 'magickal' action.

The primary and generative aim of the research was to utilise the screen as a space of 'occulting' to make visible these excitatory processes, to 'exorcise' inhibitory and problematic emotional states such as depression, anger or rumination and, ultimately, to channel this force via one's own will. Drawing largely on popular occult imagery the works use these familiar cultural forms as a way to communicate the esoteric and intangible (yet malleable) nature of cognition.

Jacques Derrida's term 'hauntology' poses that the spectre of the past must also be acknowledged as the future, for its only certainty is that it will return. Derrida coined the term in the 1980s in reference to Marxism⁷; a reflection on the persistent ideal of utopian revolution even in the wake of its failure. Infinite looping/return means that we cannot choose what will haunt us, but that we must endeavour to secure possibilities for moving forward rather than sinking into regression.

6. 'Automatism' is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as the avoidance of conscious intention in producing works of art, especially by using mechanical techniques or subconscious associations. I worked across a relatively unplanned, intuitive 'flow' of sequential frame paintings where I would let the form unfold with little analysis, depending on my considerable experience of working with video and observing motion across frames to intuit a moving form.

7. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new international* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

The project references a personal hauntology, an absorbed and remembered style and content bank that is the product of the dominant 'occulture' of my upbringing in the 1970s. It was through revisiting this culture to investigate invisible force and occult imagery, that magick began to appear as a valuable tool and a useful conduit for this thought-force and as a tool for political engagement. A general disgust with the state of contemporary Australian politics and a resultant feeling of immense individual and cultural powerlessness has been an implicit common (but not explicit) drive behind some of the more esoteric studio explorations that have been made. I have asked myself *how else can I affect change and what tools are available to me?* and further *Is it possible that there is a valuable tool in the thought-force utilised in the form of magick?* This methodology was pursued as a rejection of a persistent Western rationalism and as some antidote to this social malaise.

Magick appeared to me as a forgotten craft of my female, Anglo-pagan forbears and a potentially rich resource that remained relatively untapped for any purpose other than symbolic; a source of power to compensate for that which was being eaten away by retroactive and inadequate conservatism and right-wing politics.

Magick is shaped and built of honed, concentrated thought and, as such, is an organic low-tech, DIY device and technique ripe to be combined with the iconoclastic and empowering spirits of punk and feminism. A Surrealist influence has informed my trust in female intuitive potential as a source of alternative consciousness and thesis artworks were based in its principles of automatism and performativity before being subject to reflective reworking. This can be noted not only in the revived occult imagery but also in the speculative invocation of magick and Mediumship that operate driven by forces of desire, intent and wish fulfilment. Freud's concept of wish fulfillment theorises that this phenomenon occurs when desire is repressed, manifesting in dreams, day-dreams, hallucinations or the symptoms of neurosis. This project applies automatist technique in the studio as way of similarly realising a desired real-world outcome through the production of an affective art-object as opposed to a mental image.

Through this research I began to recognise the strategic value of magick as a vehicle worthy of investigation for its potential to effect social change. I pursued this as a desired counter to the ineffective machinations of an Australian political system that daily endangers the status of Australian women and all those who sit at, and with, the intersectional concerns of contemporary feminism. In the later stages of the research, the project began to experiment agnostically⁸ with the structures and practice of 'chaos magick'⁹ to test its form, function and possible effectiveness and was encouraged by the position of magician and writer Alan Moore who identifies the magician/shamanic role as innate to all creative practice.

This thesis work brought to maturation methods that I had used in my previous practice – a rotoscope style of animation and photographs that incorporated paint, staining and soaking within the process of mechanical/electronic reproduction.

Through these 'treated' photographs I tried to make sense of the unbound thought-force as exemplified in the *Blush* series of wine-stained portraits that expressed horror at the creative community's abuse of alcohol (my own being held up as an example).

8. Throughout this exegesis I apply the term 'agnostic' to my approach to supernature and the effectiveness of occult knowledge rather than to the more narrow application of the existence of God. Through the course of the research I neither accepted nor ruled out the effectiveness of these methods. An agnostic stance has allowed me to experiment with a form I might otherwise dismiss, with an equally liberating lack of expectation.

9. Chaos Magick is a contemporary form of magickal practice that emphasises the practical application of belief systems and an individualised approach to the creation of new and unorthodox methods. The form is believed to have been founded by Peter J. Carroll and Ray Sherwin in the U.K. in 1976.



Figure 1. *Blush 2* 2009. Wine over inkjet print on Epson watercolour paper
105 X 82 cm

Autoportrait (washed in the sea), a kind of art-effigy, reflected on the curious peace I was finding in and adjacent to natural bodies of water. A series of untitled 'Rorschach' portraits of peers, then receiving treatment for their mental health, masked them with folded inkblots.

The first translation of this form into a moving image was titled *Ectoplasmic* (2010) and was created in the first year after giving birth, becoming a reflection on my post-natal sluggish cognitive tempo. I came up with ways of combining the soaking, staining and painting techniques that I had been using to overpaint video frames, creating an animated layer that augmented my photographic reality.

This piece was made to capture the clouded internal state of my mind alongside occasional bursts of clarity. The animation visualised my internal mechanisms turned outward.

Onscreen, my figure is framed within a domestic room while a translucent watercolour cloud/mask moves over and around my head, sometimes obscuring my downcast eyes. At one point, in the brief and silent five-second loop, the eyes glance upwards and sketchy green rays burst with clarity from my eyes before I disappear into the cloud-mask once more.



Figure 2. *Ectoplasmic* 2011. Single channel video loop

I integrated errors within the printing process ('happy accidents' such as ink runout or messy ink blobs created by clumsy printer overuse) into the finished work as well as coffee stains and any other domestic abuse the work received during its creation.

These indexical traces of daily material existence all added to the life of the work as signifiers of the extended process of creation during months of development until a few seconds of the loop were complete. The technique I employed in creating *Ectoplasmic* represents the basic method I employed and developed throughout this research project.

Most of the preceding works I made have begun in this way, as performance-to-camera. It is an intimate exchange that allows for greater control of what is conveyed to an audience than any form of live performance. To literally 'act out' became the core of a catharsis or a vehicle for the embodiment of an idea. In the privacy of the studio as opposed to before an audience, however, the action may be perfected and selected with precision.

In the studio and to camera, I am able to exhibit only my performance-body, rather than offering up my living-body also. This is a particularly desirable scenario for women who recognise the female body (and particularly the non-conforming female body) as a publicly contested form and who have no desire to actively engage this particular tension in the subject of their work.

The practical work of the thesis research produced a series of videos of an augmented 'reality' that floats over and around my onscreen presence. Localised to the motion and form of my body, the animation was applied directly to (or integrally contained within) the 'substance' of a physical manifestation of the video image. Beginning in the initial and fleeting performance captured by the video camera, it was inkjet printed as individual frames on watercolour paper, and subjected to augmentation through hand-painted interventions. The idea being that through this process there was a transferral of thought energy via the gestures that occur in paint.

Research components of live action/task-based works significantly underpinned the animation as a way to translate and test ideas and concepts with greater urgency and less time constraints than is usual for full animation production. I have also employed two-dimensional images to experiment stylistically and test visual content and painting techniques.

The project outcome is a suite of performed and animated screen-works that operate as sigils and in which I enact varying states of cognition – from passive to active – and exorcise and channel cognition with a magickal purpose. These sigils/artworks are purposed and activated through making and viewing until they realise their vocation by being witnessed (exhibited to an audience) which completes a cycle of enchantment.

Whether an artwork is directed internally towards the self or externally toward the greater community and whether or not a spell, charm or attempt at Mediumship can be judged as successful – that is to say, as having literally achieved its aims – the discipline of magick practice has proved immensely powerful in the formation and clarification of intent and desire.

This discipline is most notable in the care and responsibility that must be taken in naming and crafting magickal intent. It is a powerful tool of self-knowledge and focuses that intent to a finely honed point of accuracy. This is a tool that can only add value and clarity to the construction of purposeful art-making and political action. It is a practice demanding the absolute clarification of a request – *this is what I want* – and concomitant careful selection of its method of transmission.

The Exegesis

Chapter One, *Animation and the force of thought*, introduces a brief catalogue of references for the visualisation of thought. This includes a discussion on the concepts informing my animations and their form and also provides discussion on the experimental films of Stan Brakhage, the art of the animators Max Fleischer, George Dunning and Ralph Bakshi and on the early experimental films and animations of noted film director, David Lynch.

All these artists have influenced my thinking and making. The visual thesis is notable for its form of animation over photographic video and this is further contextualised by the painted photographs of Annette Messager, Arnulf Rainier and Gerhard Richter.

In chapter two, *Time, rhythm, pulse and repetition*, I discuss screen time versus working time and examine the trope of loop structure and its resulting rhythm and pulse. I reference some observations by Rosalind Krauss and draw parallels between video loops and other psychological and transformative thought patterns. I also posit a relationship between processes of purposeful intervention in thought (mantra, meditation, hypnosis, cognitive behavioural therapy) and intention-based thought processes (prayer, ritual and magick), all of which may employ a statement of intent combined with repetition as their functional structure to seek to achieve their intended outcomes.

Chapter three, *Haunt and Hauntology* traces the evolution of the term 'hauntology' and I offer a catalogue of the elements of my personal hauntology as stylistic features of my work. I cite and expand upon the influence of Victorian spirit photography and 'occultation' identified as surrealist practice, while modes and intents of occulting are discussed with particular reference to André Breton. This chapter also gives some account of three of the most significant exhibition outcomes from this research – *The Pickup Artists*, *Monsterring* and *Allport: Unhoused*.

In Chapter four, *Art practice/Magickal practice* I establish the playful, speculative position of ‘arcanum agnostic’¹⁰, which allowed me to consider my studio practice as a form of occulting, a practice that can bring forth conceptions of artworks as sigils, talismanic charms, curses or objects of hoodoo¹¹. I describe some of the philosophical and ideological influences that led me on an exploration of magick intent and the development of a mode of ‘enchantment’ — such as the witch as feminist identity and author and magician Alan Moore’s consideration of the artist as shaman.

The work of Canadian two-person artist collective Fastwürms, are an instructive point of reference, especially their influence in shifting my work towards magickal practice with political intent. To give voice to a distinctly female anguish born of political frustration I drew on the vernacular of traditional women’s craft, drawing and establishing a link between witchcraft and contemporary feminist art.

10. Meaning I was neither a true believer, nor disbeliever in the effectiveness of my esoteric studio experiments. I would further describe my position as one of ‘optimistic scepticism’.

11. Hoodoo is a form of folk magick that arrived in the US from Africa with the slave trade. It is often, mistakenly, referred to as voodoo (the Haitian religious practice).

Chapter 1: Animation and the force of thought

Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish,
is dear to me, and I will defend it.¹²

Frankenstein – The Modern Prometheus, Shelley, Mary Woolstonecraft

The writing of neurologist Norman Doidge describes the brain's capacity to create structural change within itself through specific cognitive use, as well as environmental, behavioural and neural forces¹³. Thought is an electro-chemical phenomenon, a series of neurons, firing in sequence. As Sara Chodosh has described;

When a single neuron fires, it is an isolated chemical blip. When many fire together, they form a thought¹⁴.

Recent scientific research into brain plasticity by Doidge and others suggest that this mental activity – the forming of a thought – has force. While still not fully understood, mental processes such as emotion, cognition and intent seem to possess a kind of physical dynamism.

This studio-based research carries forward the concept of a physical thought-force through animation – a moving image form in which the exertion of this force can be expressed and a form extrapolated as it develops across time and through which a greater investment of thought and intent can be conducted through making.

12. Mary Woolstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein – The Modern Prometheus* (New York: Signet Classics, 1965), 95.

13. Norman Doidge, *The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science* (New York: Viking Press, 2007).

14. Sara Chodosh. *Mind Aglow: Scientists Watch Thoughts Form in the Brain: A new technology shows real-time communication among neurons that promises to reveal brain activity in unprecedented detail*, Scientific American, August 24, 2016 .

< <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mind-aglow-scientists-watch-thoughts-form-in-the-brain/> >

1.1 A ritual process

Handmade animation is a ritualistic process. You create a frame, then another and another and exercise this process in repetition with commitment and sustained attention until the sequence is complete. The repetitious nature of the process draws focus in the manner of other serial and contemplative forms such as reciting a spoken mantra or prayer with the rosary.

With the extended and protracted working methods of animation, there is no sense of the success or failure of the ritual until the entire process has been undertaken. This requires both a sustained faith in the artwork being created and a preparedness to discard everything once the investment of this ritual process is complete, the process taking precedence over the product. I have learnt through this process to surrender to chance, which also relieves me of some responsibility to the artwork; it makes it easier to let go if it is unsuccessful.

Throughout this project I undertook the ritual of painting with a somewhat automatist approach. I began with some sense of the desired elements and a confident sense of how motion occurs and is represented across time. Progressing through frames, a thought-force emerged, visualised and represented as a kind of aura that hung in the air over and around the figure like the muslin forms and double exposures of a Victorian spirit photograph¹⁵.

15. As the studio research developed, these soft 'auras' gradually began to be accompanied by harder lines and shapes.

Differing from the static capture of a formal photograph, these images instead moved and shifted and became more or less opaque as frames passed before the eye. They began to 'boil.'

'Boil' is an industry term for the effect of mis-registration between frames. When animation boils, frame images do not cleanly align and the motion flashes, wiggles and jumps as a result. It is the hallmark of hand-made animation. Initially a description signifying a flaw, it has come to be appreciated, within animation, as the mark of the artist's hand as well as a desired effect of some experimental film and animation work and even in mainstream TV animation series such as *Dr Katz, Professional Therapist* (1995).¹⁶

1.2 Technique

My technique occupies a space somewhere between the art of rotoscope – an animation technique involving 'tracing' over the frames of film in order to perfectly emulate natural movement in animated form - and more traditional hand-painted forms of animation.

I began in performance to camera with photographic video. I would edit a loop to my satisfaction, export its constituent frames and digitally lay them out, carefully numbered, usually with two frames to an A4 sheet.

¹⁶The credits of *Dr Katz* refer to their own particular technique as 'squigglevision'.

A domestic printer was used to prepare the frames for painting and I preferred to use sheets of watercolour paper rather than conventional printer papers. This risked shortening the life of the printer but provided a surface ground that would take paint well and which held and blended colours truly. Cheaper papers intended for domestic printing degrade, lose their surface integrity and become muddy under too much colour, so if budget constrained the use of the more expensive watercolour paper, I tended to work more monochromatically in order to preserve the image surface: less colour equals less moisture, resulting in a cleaner image.

Next, I assembled my voluminous stack of frames (ten seconds of video can add up to 240 frames or 120 pages), clear a large space and begin to paint. I liked to retain flow if possible, and would try to complete the painting in as few sessions as possible to maintain clarity of focus. I considered one sitting ideal but it was usually not realistic. This focus gathered and sharpened not only around the task, but also the content and intent of the work through making. Maintaining focus required little effort and it felt akin to a natural meditation that arose within the process. Once the painting was complete, the paintings were scanned and reassembled, layered in Adobe Photoshop and then reanimated as a moving image. This moving image was then imported into Final Cut Pro to be finessed before any audio was added.

I chose watercolour for its loosely variable intensity, translucency – integrating nicely with the original video image underneath – and for its resistance to control. As a medium, watercolour mirrors my own perception of the thought process as something that washes and flows and that can take some direction yet can easily slip away from you. As such, it creates an ideal metaphor and model for this otherwise invisible force. I enjoyed yielding to its fluidity and gently relinquishing my hold over it. I liken the animation painting to automatic writing or any other form of automatism as it relied only on some inherent knowledge of the way motion occurs from frame to frame to define the boundaries of its form. It was used as a way to channel a specific emotional state, one that was sometimes remembered or sometimes realised through the act of making.

I have a strong understanding of constructed motion so, while I worked, I balanced on a tipping point between allowing fluidity to direct the paint, and gently directing a visual ‘arc’ of motion over the duration of the loop. Experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage, a significant influence upon this research, described this aspect of painting the frames of a moving image as being the ‘gardener’, tending and nurturing the growth of an image making itself across time.¹⁷

17. Stan Brakhage, *Reflecting Thought*. Directed by Jason Starr and Howie Movshovitz. KRMA-TV, 1985. Television broadcast.
< https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tVu_AT_zk8 >

Through the process of converting the video to an animation I made skin contact with every frame and the physical pages were intensely handled through the sequential processes. I would collate, paint, stain, scar then re-collate, scan, bundle and store. They became a fetish or worry doll, receiving both my care and my fidgety unrest.

A crucial premise of this project is that through this process there was a transferral of the energy of my thought, via the making gestures that are recorded in paint, into the eventual screen image – an accumulation of anguish, or anger, or hope. I propose that when I allowed chaos to take hold, it was the energy of my focus that drove any direction to the flow or spatter or splash of ink.

There was some hoodoo in this ritual and process and it seems to me that there was some material horror too. I stripped video of life by rendering it as single frames, in order to later resurrect it as an augmented and intensely 'handled' version of its earlier self. When I think of it in those terms it is actually a somewhat brutal and uncanny technique. From the earliest work, *Ectoplasmic*, these animations have felt shadowed by something like a dark magick or a grim science, reminiscent of the nature of Shelley's character, Victor Frankenstein.

Each image was brought to life through acts of concentrated patience, skill and attention. This process focussed intent, gathered then diffused emotion, absorbed mental concentration and attempted to transform ruminations (like Victor Frankenstein's anguish) into material form as catharsis or, as the process was further developed, through the force of will.

This was my 'occulting'. The screen was its container.

1.3 Neuroplasticity: a register of force

I first encountered the concept of neuroplasticity through a course of psychological treatment. Cognitive behavioural therapy formed a significant portion of a psychologist's strategy to counter my anxiety disorder. The psychologist spoke of my brain using the analogy of a grassy piece of land, describing how my anxious thoughts had walked trails through this 'grass' to form inaccurate and worrying conclusions until these had become the easiest 'path' to take every time. She explained that our work was to challenge my troubling and irrational thoughts in order to reach different, more realistic, conclusions. The process entailed laboriously forging new pathways, eventually letting the old ones grow over with disuse. I initially assumed the word 'pathways' was also an analogy, but she impressed upon me that new pathways were actually being established within the structure of my brain.

This relatively new knowledge of the ‘plastic’ brain capable of restructuring itself, posits the existence of a mental force and it is this force that I attempted, at first, to visualise and then later to harness through art-purposed magick; an optimistic extrapolation upon the possibilities of mental force.

In Doidge’s two books, *The Brain That Changes Itself* (2007) and *The Brain’s Way of Healing* (2015), he describes a number of fascinating medical case histories that have demonstrated brain plasticity and a variety of treatments for neurological problems. In Doidge’s words, ‘mental activity is not only the product of the brain, but the shaper of it.’¹⁸

Each case history illustrates the brain’s capacity to restructure itself with focussed exercise and therapy. Neuroplastic therapies demand a lot of their patients – dedication to task and repetition at an excruciating level. The tasks that generate the repeated firing of synapses along desired paths create new ‘brain maps’¹⁹ capable of waking the body from paralysis, restoring inner ear function, or erasing ailments such as the constancy of chronic pain.

18. Norman Doidge. *The Brain’s Way of Healing: Remarkable Discoveries and Recoveries from the Frontiers of Neuroplasticity* (New York: Random House, 2015), Preface xvi.

19. Put simply, brain mapping is a technique of studying the brain’s modes of function. It utilises contemporary medical technologies to observe the firing of synapses in response to the touch or use of other parts of the body and the mental processes connected with these activities. Each individual input of information will fire repeatedly in the same part of the brain without intervention. By observing and recording this process, an individual’s brain can be mapped to discover which parts operate which function.

My extrapolation of neuroplasticity research is that the plastic state of the brain suggests and perhaps even proves that thought has a force. Through creative allegory my research visualises and then attempts to harness that thought-force: an energy humans have yet to fully utilise or, arguably (with the onset of a more secular age and the imposition of impersonal rituals) have forgotten how to utilise.

1.4 How thought is pictured: a personal catalogue of references

Four key contextual references that informed my approach:²⁰ Stephen King's 1974 horror novel *Carrie* (and the 1976 Brian de Palma film adaptation of the same name) about a psychokinetic teenager; Victorian theosophists Annie Besant and C.W Leadbeater's synaesthetic book *Thought-Forms* (first published in 1901); Catherine Storr's 1958 children's fantasy novel, *Marianne Dreams* (adapted for film in 1988 as *Paperhouse*, directed by Bernard Rose), and the experimental films of Stan Brakhage.

Psychokinesis (or telekinesis), is the ability to move objects with the force of the mind, and is a scientifically unproven phenomenon that nevertheless still operates as an emblem for the force of thought.

20. *Carrie* and *Marianne Dreams* in particular could also be considered a part of my individual hauntology (as defined in chapter three) but in this initial part of the discussion they provide a cultural context to my own imaginings of thought-force.

While my studio explorations have only lightly touched on the notion of telekinesis in some 2D images, passages from Stephen King's novel *Carrie* as well as images from Brian De Palma's film version give form to an entrenched fear of those perpetually anxious; a fear of the force of one's own emotions and thought processes when heightened and seemingly outside of one's own control. The power of Carrie White's rage is presented as something to both fear and desire.

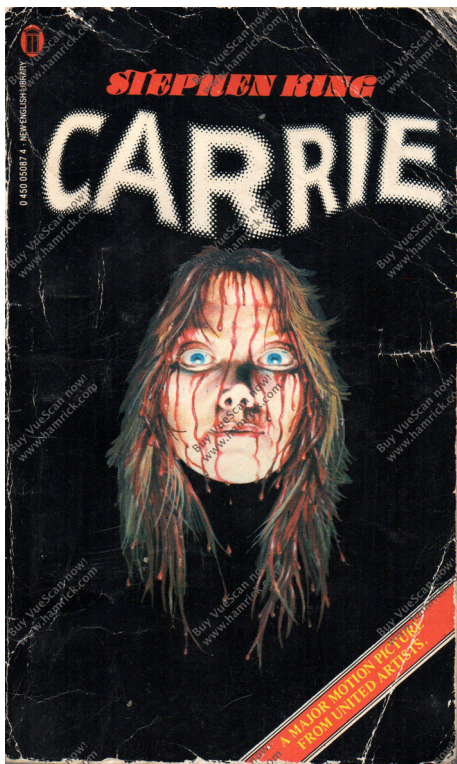


Figure 3. Cover of my own paperback edition of *Carrie*, New English Library 1981

The telekinetic powers of Carrie are inextricably tied to her womanhood and emerged at her menarche.

They are unleashed as a force generated in, and strengthened by, her repeated humiliation: the jibes of her abusive, mad mother for being too womanly and the scorn of her classmates for not being, in their teenaged definition, womanly enough. Carrie's telekinesis is practiced in secret alone in her room:

She looked at the hairbrush on her bureau.
Flex.
She was lifting the hairbrush, it was heavy. It was like lifting a barbell with very weak arms. Oh. Grunt.
The hairbrush slid to the end of the bureau, slid out past the point where gravity should have toppled it and then dangled, as if on an invisible string.
Carrie's eyes had closed to slits. Veins pulsed in her temples. A doctor might have been interested in what her body was doing at that instant; it made no rational sense. Respiration had fallen to sixteen breaths per minute. Blood pressure up to 190/100. Heartbeat up to 140 – higher than astronauts under the heavy g-load of lift off. Temperature down to 94.3°. Her body was burning energy that seemed to be coming from nowhere and seemed to be going nowhere. An electroencephalogram would have shown alpha waves that were no longer waves at all but great, jagged spikes.
She let the hairbrush down carefully.²¹

In accurate translation within the film adaptation, the force is only ever 'seen' by its effect of inanimate objects suddenly in motion such as a hairbrush and shifting bedroom furniture then eventually fire hoses, street hydrants, safety doors and electrical cable as the terrible force of her shame and betrayal is unleashed in an electrical firestorm at her school prom.

As she watched, he climbed down and ran toward the rock band's equipment. He caught hold of one of the microphone stands and was transfixed. Carrie watched, amazed, as his body went through a nearly motionless dance of electricity. His feet shuffled in the water, his hair stood up in spikes, and his mouth jerked open, like the mouth of a fish. He looked funny. She began to laugh.

(by christ then let them all look funny)

And in a sudden, blind thrust, she yanked at all the power she could feel.

21. Stephen King, *Carrie* (New York: A Signet Book: New American Library, 1976), 74.

Some of the lights puffed out. There was a dazzling flash somewhere as a live power cord hit a puddle of water. There were dull thumps in her mind as circuit breakers went into hopeless operation. The boy who had been holding the mike stand fell over on one of his amps and there was an explosion of purple sparks and then the crepe bunting that faced the stage was burning.²²

Carrie is the ultimate outsider; a classic teenaged character-trope gifted, in true horror-genre form, with a power she has yet to learn to control. King (and later De Palma's) pop-cultural siting of the presence and power of the thought-force has remained highly influential and the visual allegory of feminine shame constructed by a bucket of pig-blood dumped over Carrie's head as she is crowned Prom Queen is reflected in the dark and dripping appearance of some of the works emerging from the studio research.

Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater's *Thought-Forms*²³, a theosophic publication of the Victorian age²⁴, contains a series of illustrations of emotion-generated auras and seemingly synaesthetic experiences.²⁵ They provide a key form-guide to the visual construction and colour ways of different patterns of thought, as described by those with the clairvoyant gift to see. This text and its accompanying imagery was a validating and inspirational discovery. It is an unshakeably optimistic text.

22. King, *Carrie*, 172.

23. Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater. *Thought-Forms* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1905)

24. I retain an interest in disproven or discarded philosophy for two reasons; firstly as a reminder of how thought evolves and in the second instance with the eye of an avid recycler – 'there might be something useful here'.

25. This book can easily be explained today, I believe, as the rationalisations of a prime synaesthete.

One of the most interesting of the highroads from the physical to the astral is that of the study of thought. The Western scientist, commencing in the anatomy and physiology of the brain, endeavours to make these the basis for "a sound psychology." He passes then into the region of dreams, illusions, hallucinations; and as soon as he endeavours to elaborate an experimental science which shall classify and arrange these, he inevitably plunges into the astral plane. Dr Baraduc²⁶ of Paris has nearly crossed the barrier, and is well on the way towards photographing astro-mental images, to obtaining pictures of what from the materialistic standpoint would be the results of vibrations in the grey matter of the brain.²⁷

The authors describe thought-forms as a disruption of the human astral body (it is a given in this text that we understand that humans navigate the world within a larger, field of energy – our projected astral body or ‘elemental essence’) made by the energy of thought and emotion. If the generative cognition relates to an object or person it will move towards it, but if it is contained to the thinker it will appear as a singular, equally contained form, rising up to an ascended, ‘buddhic’ plane²⁸ if the thought is of a spiritual nature.

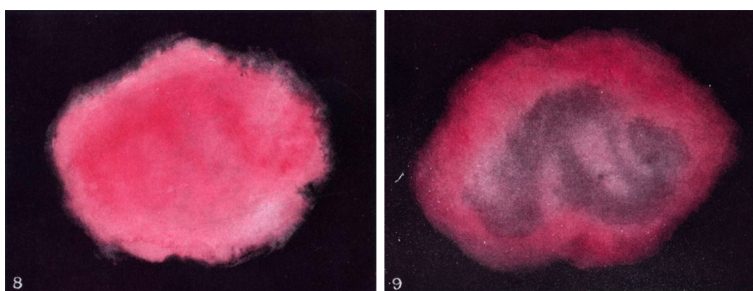


Figure 4. Two images from *Thought-Forms*.
The left representing ‘vague pure affection’ and the right ‘vague selfish affection’

26. Hippolyte Baraduc was a French physician and parapsychologist known for his claim that a ‘mist’, that he believed to be the human soul, leaves the human corpse at the point of death. He set up a camera at his own wife’s death bed to prove this and took a series of photos as she passed that sequentially showed a number of mists over her that then joined into a single form and disappeared. The photos have long been assumed to be photographic trickery.

27. Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, 11.

28. The seven planes of existence (or states of consciousness beyond the physical) are common across a number of religious and esoteric teachings. The fourth of these is known as the Buddhic (or Unity) Plane and is described as the realm of pure consciousness; an enlightened state where ego becomes resolved and irrelevant.

The book notes that there are three primary types of thought-form: that which takes the image of the thinker; that which takes the image of some material object and, thirdly, that which takes a form entirely its own expressing its inherent qualities in the matter which it draws round it. The book attempts to represent this third form, pointing out that portraits and pairings of objects are easily wrought and easy to describe, but the third form of thought requires translation for the education of the greater public about the power and effect of their good and bad thoughts.

In turn, there are three principles to the production of each thought-form: first, that the quality of thought determines colour; two, that the nature of thought determines form, and three that definiteness of thought determines clarity of outline.

In Besant and Leadbeaters' book I read about cloudy and granulated aura forms that recalled both my painted animations as well as the forms of spirit photography. What is more, the book's synaesthetic descriptions and colour keys offered both a symbolic colour way for my visualisations of haunting thoughts and a logic to their appearance. In thanking the book's artists in the Foreword however, it would seem that Besant considers that artistic illustration, in all its materiality, falls well short of what the imagination can conjure:

To paint in earth's dull colours the forms clothed in the living light of other worlds is a hard and thankless task; so much the more gratitude is due to those who have attempted it. They needed coloured fire, and had only ground earths. ²⁹

29. Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, Foreword, page 6

The soft, clouded forms, such as that pictured in the left of Figure 4 representing 'vague pure affection' have an optical resonance that rings true to its subject. The image on the right represents 'vague, selfish affection' and is muddled with the negative connotations of this manner of rumination.

I directly utilised the books colour key to colourise the ectoplasms for one particular work (*Summonings* in 2014) as a way to inject some symbolic aspirations into the work – an early and unconscious step into using the works to craft magick as opposed to operating a shamanic healing³⁰. For the 'ectoplasms' in *Summonings* I chose a brown-tinged rose-pink for 'unselfish affection', a light sky blue for 'devotion to a noble ideal' and a clear yellow for 'highest intellect'.

Ultimately I began to use the *Thought-Forms* colour lexicon more intuitively, particularly evidenced in all the works produced for the exhibition *Monsterring and Other Thought-Forms* in 2015 where colour of video and painted photographs is more high-key and considered than in previous works.

30. I would retrospectively argue the earlier works in this project as 'shamanic', utilising a combination of ritual and desire as an intuitive and esoteric form of self-healing. Later works such as those described in Chapter 4 were more deliberate and focussed attempts to craft or cast magick with applied thought-force and so create an 'affect' within the greater community. It is this form that will be pursued in animation beyond this research.

It is noted in the text that each definite thought produces a double effect—a radiating vibration and a floating form. This proved a useful description to carry forward as a reference point to give depth and dimension to my own animated thought-forms.

Marianne Dreams is a 1952 children's novel by Catherine Storr, about an invalid girl who draws to amuse herself while confined to bed rest. After beginning to use a specific pencil found in her great-grandmother's sewing box, Marianne begins to dream her drawings and discovers the ability to shape her dreams by drawing what she desires to appear in them, beginning with a house and adding a face in the window as someone for company. In the dream however, she finds she neglected to draw a door for her own entry or stairs for Mark (the boy whose face she drew) to exit from the upper floor. In the 1988 film adaptation, titled *Paperhouse*, when Mark reassures her he that he can't walk anyway she responds 'Oh, of course you can't, I forgot to draw you any legs...'

Marianne tries to draw things to improve his life in the bleak house she created. Food, games etc. but everything is slightly askew, their diet for instance is limited to boiled eggs and cold cooked sausages because these are the only foods she can draw with confidence.

Over the course of Marianne's nightly visits, they become friends. She becomes aware that Mark, too, has a waking life (although in her dreams he does not remember this), that he is also seriously ill and confined to bed and that they share the same governess and tutor. Marianne presses the governess for more information on her friend.

This friendship has its ups and downs. The ill and short-tempered Marianne often regrets the way she has angrily drawn her feelings.

'I'm feeling awful about THEM. I think it's my fault.'
'Your fault?'
'Don't be angry Mark, and say I want to run the whole show, but I did draw some stones awfully like those out there, round the house.'
Mark was silent for a moment. Then he said 'what about the eyes?'
'That's what's so awful. I did give them eyes.'
'What on earth did you do that for?' Mark cried out, popping himself up in bed with a sudden show of energy. 'Whatever made you draw a lot of beastly things like that if you knew what you drew was going to sort of come alive like this? Why couldn't you draw something decent for a change?'

– From *Marianne Dreams* ³¹

Within their night-time existence she has to cope with the darkness intensified by the scribbling that she has done over her windows. Her fear is exacerbated by a surrounding group of malevolent sentinel one-eyed boulders that she created in her frustrated anger. Her bedridden mission is to create an escape route by which Mark and she can get to a lighthouse that she remembers from family holidays in happier times.

Within the world of this novel, rendering an image becomes a magical and transformative act, a gift that Marianne struggles to master and understand.

31. Catherine Storr, *Marianne Dreams* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1958), 97.

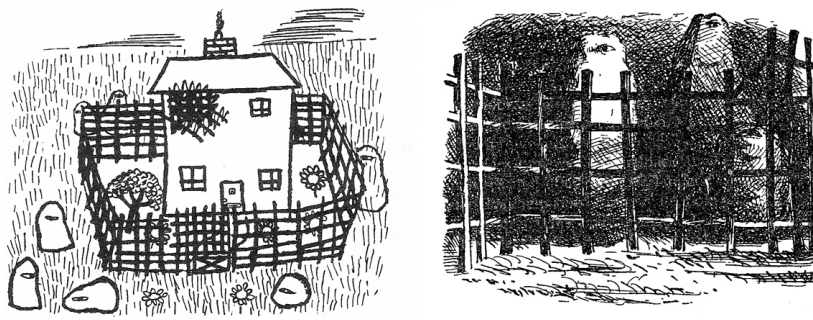


Figure 5. Marjorie-Ann Watts, two illustrations from *Marianne Dreams* 1958. The left a rendering of one of Marianne's angry drawing alterations and right, the resulting sentinel boulders depicted in dream state.

In *Paperhouse* (in which Marianne is renamed Anna), in an attempt to 'save' themselves from the bleak place she has created, Anna tries to draw her father from a photograph (her mother notes, 'he was drunk when that was taken'). Lacking the skill to accurately render his image, she declares he looks too angry and, unable to erase the pencil, she scribbles over his face unwittingly creating an angry, slurring and blinded ogre in her dreams. The scenes of him calling for her are genuinely terrifying; a nightmare writ from an inexperienced magick-worker who is unable to articulate her desires clearly.

It was experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage's intent that the cognitive processes underlying his hand-painted films would be evident within the final screen-based presentation.

If I close my eyes I continue to see.

A lot of adults lose that ability but all children even rub their eyes to create an intensification of fireworks or explosions and that's what I call the first level of seeing yourself thinking. And then you see what you would call abstract which is why most adults forget it... it won't help you get a job or anything to see abstractly. But what we are aware of is that amidst these abstractions we can commission some memories or we're prompted by things that happen to remember Grandmother or whatever.

But what interests me more, and seems very much neglected, are the abstractions themselves that carry the true mood that the person is having. Then it becomes more than mood because those shapes, that children rub their eyes to create explosions of, those shapes do form symbols; symbolic shapes like a heart. If science comes up with a machine so you can tap into people's actual thinking process, and then project whatever they're thinking as vision up on a screen – I'm doing that by laboriously painting because we don't have any way to do that.³²

– Stan Brakhage

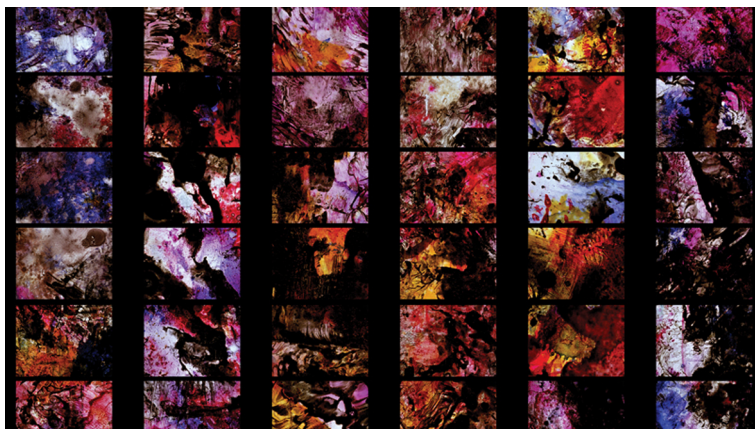


Figure 6. Still frames from Brakhage's *Stellar*, 1993. Film.

Image source: <https://heroesberlin.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/brakhage.jpg>

He has written extensively and poetically on the subject, with particular beauty in the essay *My Eye* first published in *Metaphors on Vision* in 1963.

My eye, turning toward the imaginary, will go to any wave-lengths for its sights. I'm writing of cognisance. Mind's eye awareness of all addressing vibrations. What rays pass through this retina still unretained by mind? How long has sight's centre continued pupil to other men's imaginings? This sensitive instrument must respond to all the gods who will deign to play upon it.

...

My eye, then, in spiralling, fractioning style wise, being instrument for striking sparks, is bequeathed visions at every illumination its struck to create... Similar vistas being available to any viewer willing to release his eye for comparable movement.

My eye so lost in space that fall feels accessional, so style-beguiled as to know no "reality", sea running down-uphill, willy-nilly, waves not known by their phosphorescence but thru aesthetic reflection only... similar illuminations possible for any viewer capable of understanding his very vision as a metaphoric creation either directly inspired by nature or watered down by the cliché sights of others.³³

32. Transcript from an interview with Brakhage in *Reflecting Thought: Stan Brakhage*. Directed by Jason Starr and Howie Movshovitz. KRMA-TV, 1985. Television broadcast <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tVu_AT_zk8>

33. Stan Brakhage, 'My Eye' in *Essential Brakhage: Selected Writings on Filmmaking* (New York:Kingston, McPherson & Co. 2001) 25.

While the majority of filmmakers utilise their craft to show us something, Brakhage seems driven by a desire to remind us of something. To aid our recall of a kind of vision that we have access to at all times within our own physiognomy.

Most significant to my framing of this project is Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963): a 'collage' film made by sandwiching moth wings, flower petals and bits of grass between stripes of film splicing tape. The fragile result was reprinted in a film lab to allow it to be screened without damage.

Brakhage has spoken of the impetus behind his making of this film:

Here is a film that I made out of a deep grief. The grief is my business in a way, but the grief was helpful in squeezing the little film out of me, that I said "these crazy moths are flying into the candlelight, and burning themselves to death, and that's what's happening to me. I don't have enough money to make these films, and ... I'm not feeding my children properly, because of these damn films, you know. And I'm burning up here... What can I do?" I'm feeling the full horror of some kind of immolation, in a way.

Over the light bulbs there's all these dead moth wings, and I ... hate that. Such a sadness; there must surely be something to do with that. I tenderly picked them out and start pasting them onto a strip of film, to try to... give them life again, to animate them again, to try to put them into some sort of life through the motion picture.

– Brakhage interviewed by Bruce Kavin in 2002³⁴

The flickering abstract motion that results onscreen is effectively reminiscent of the living moths' motion as it drives itself against a light globe towards destruction. In another analogy to Mary Shelley's character of Victor Frankenstein, Brakhage successfully resurrected the dead, if only through the passage of a film's projection.

34. Peter Becker, Kate Elmore, Shayne Christiansen, Fred Camper and Stan Brakhage. *By Brakhage. An Anthology, Volume One*, DVD (United States: The Criterion Collection, 2010).

1.5 David Lynch's moving paintings.

It was one of my paintings. I don't remember which one, but it was an almost all-black painting. And it had a figure in it, and the figure was in the centre of the canvas. So I'm looking at this figure in the painting, and I hear a little wind, and see a little movement. And I had a wish that the painting would really be able to move, you know, some little bit. And that was it.

– David Lynch interviewed by Chris Rodley³⁵

In the earliest days of David Lynch's career, while still an art student, he experimented broadly with animation in the intervening steps between 'painter' and 'filmmaker' and it feels like the correct place to discuss these experiments here, in the intervening steps between describing my basis for visualising thought and describing the basis of my technique for doing so.

Six Men Getting Sick (1967) was a film loop projected upon a sculptural screen made with three casts of Lynch's own face and upper body, the other three men of the six in the title appearing only as animations. Over this screen was projected a loop of painted frames that graduated from a simple countdown, to expressionistic interventions that mark out anatomic details such as stomachs, oesophagus and mouth, all while the noise of a siren loops urgently.

35. David Lynch and Chris Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 37.



Figure 7. David Lynch, four phases of *Six Men Getting Sick* 1967.

Film projection onto custom screen.

Image: <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2014/09/10/t-magazine/10lynch-hoban-slide-BWVN/10lynch-hoban-slide-BWVN-jumbo.jpg>

The mood intensifies as the film loop elapses and the figures begin to clutch at their heads and mouths with painted hands as the sickness takes hold and a turbulent splashing makes its way up from the stomachs to each mouth to explode in a violent painted spew that drips down the screen before beginning again.

While the screen is long gone, documentation of the projection-on-screen was shown at close to its original scale in the 2016 Lynch retrospective, *Between Two Worlds* at GOMA. It is a work that makes you edgy from the outset, due to the siren screaming a warning of danger. The six figures whose faces come and go, or remain with mouths eternally agape, are possessed of a collective anatomy that grows across the screen like a fungus, before the screen flashes red as a warning and the vomit drips and forms an eroded landscape across a purple horizon – a disgusting Mount Rushmore retch.

After graduation, Lynch took his interest in 'moving paintings' and began to explore the collision of animation with live-action film in his two shorts *The Alphabet* (1968) and *The Grandmother* (1970).



Figure 8. David Lynch, still frame from *The Alphabet* 1968. 16mm film.
Image: <https://yuwenlee.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/alpha.jpg>

In the former, letters of the alphabet reside in a surreal landscape while within an adjacent room a figure struggles to emerge from a drawn line and shape to the sound of a baby's cry. This white-faced girl (now live action, but as flatly depicted as if drawn) struggles restlessly dreaming in a bed and is traumatised by language as taunting voices chant repeatedly "ABC, ABC..." She delivers a fragile rendition of the ABC song before becoming overwhelmed and spewing blood across the sheets.

In the latter, a lonely, bed-wetting boy - a child of abusive dog-like parents - attends to a giant fungus that he has grown in his urine soaked sheets and from which emerges a loving grandmother figure.



Figure 9. David Lynch, still frame from *The Grandmother* 1970.
Image: http://verocinema.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/IMG_4241.jpg

The nurturing relief she brings is short-lived however as, like all Grandparents, she is close to death and must depart.

The surreal, dreamlike nature of the narratives is fostered by the drawn animation. Lynch has created a dream state, where 'things' are not fixed by their form. His characters are neither themselves nor something other – the photographs and the life-cast of Lynch's face are altered by the amorphous qualities of paint and pencil adjacent to (and eventually in *The Grandmother*, drawn over) the surface of the-photographic film.

Lynch's short films exemplify the power of animation as a tool through which to manifest the un-visible or to externalise a visual that otherwise only exists in the mind.

1.6 Record and construct: rotoscope, overpainting and the layered image

[S]urrealist photography exploits the special connection to reality with which all photography is endowed. For photography is an imprint or transfer off the real; it is a photochemically processed trace causally connected to that thing in the world to which it refers in a manner parallel to that of fingerprints or footprints or the rings of water that cold glasses leave on tables. [...] On the family tree of images it is closer to palm prints, death masks, the Shroud of Turin, or the tracks of gulls on beaches. For technically and semiologically speaking, drawings and paintings are icons, while photographs are indexes. Given this special status with regard to the real, being, that is, a kind of deposit of the real itself, the manipulations wrought by the surrealist photographers—the spacings and doublings—are intended to register the spacings and doublings of that very reality of which this photograph is merely the faithful trace. In this way the photographic medium is exploited to produce a paradox: the paradox of reality constituted as sign -or presence transformed into absence, into representation, into spacing, into writing.³⁶

Over a number of essays written in the 1980s Krauss went on to demonstrate the centrality of photography to surrealism with the intention of showing a kind of dialectical synthesis of opposites. Photography was used to service automatism and the surrealists employed a number of interventionist strategies. Krauss writes:

Throughout the avant garde in the 1920s, photomontage was understood as a means of infiltrating the mere picture of reality with it's meaning.³⁷

Krauss goes on to argue that practitioners such as Aragon and Heartfield undertook a revision of photography, taking it away from the surface of the real, an idea underscored by the writing of Berthold Brecht.

³⁶ Rosalind Krauss. 'Photography in the Service of Surrealism', *L'amour Fou :Photography & Surrealism* (Washington, D.C: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985), 31.

³⁷ Rosalind Krauss. "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism", *October*, Vol. 19 (Winter, 1981), pp. 3-34

She outlines how surrealist strategies went beyond Dada photomontage using doubling, repetition and solarisation, and concludes that in the hands of avant garde artists in Europe in the 1920s, particularly the surrealists, something *supplementary was added to reality*; 'Reality was both extended and replaced or supplanted by that master supplement which is writing: the paradoxical writing of the photograph.'³⁸

In my own work the photographic is layered with the imagined, realities become fused and influence the perception of one another; the everyday (that which has been recorded) becomes more enchanted while the imagined or constructed, in turn, becomes more possible.

The collision of realities between 'record' (film) and 'construct' (animation) has been tested broadly across the history of animation for the screen, not only in the world of experimental film but also through popular culture. Simply through the act of viewing we believe in Bob Hoskins interrogating Jessica Rabbit, Tom and Jerry dancing with Gene Kelly and Dick Van Dyke cavorting with penguins in *Mary Poppins*. Humans are persuadable, or at least are willing to be, under the right circumstances.

³⁸ Krauss. 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism'. 34.



Figure 10. Jerry Mouse and Gene Kelly in MGMs *Anchors Aweigh* 1945

Image: <https://eastman.org/sites/default/files/Anchors%20Aweigh%20R5-3.jpg>

Contemporary audiences are particularly media-savvy and confident in their understanding of the screen image, in a manner that many people are not in relation to art criticism. An art audience will readily become technical analysts of anything they view on a screen.

There's a power in embedding one form of representation (record/construct) into another that stops audience analysis in its tracks and allows the viewer to engage with the work on a new and more intuitive level. When the image is neither one thing nor another, it falls somewhat outside the viewer's experience, and its analysis and classification becomes irrelevant. The audience is liberated from the consideration of *what is this?* and is more quickly elevated to the next experiential level of *what am I seeing?*

Within this project, image layering has taken dual forms: overpainting as image construction and rotoscope – the way the painting interacts (if not traces) the photographic video beneath – as a method of motion.

My technique bears a close enough relationship to the technique known as rotoscope for me to comfortably describe it this way. Rotoscope is the invention of Max Fleischer, an animator who was active through the early twentieth century and the creator of the famous Betty Boop character. Fleischer and his brother, Dave, developed the technique with Max shooting film of Dave performing the movements of each character. He then used a lightbox projection system to trace the motion, forming it within a character's likeness. Most of the Fleischer brothers' character dances, including those of Betty Boop, were produced this way. A notable example being the use of the jazz musician and performer, Cab Calloway, as the foundation for a number of characters, including one stalwart, Koko the Clown.

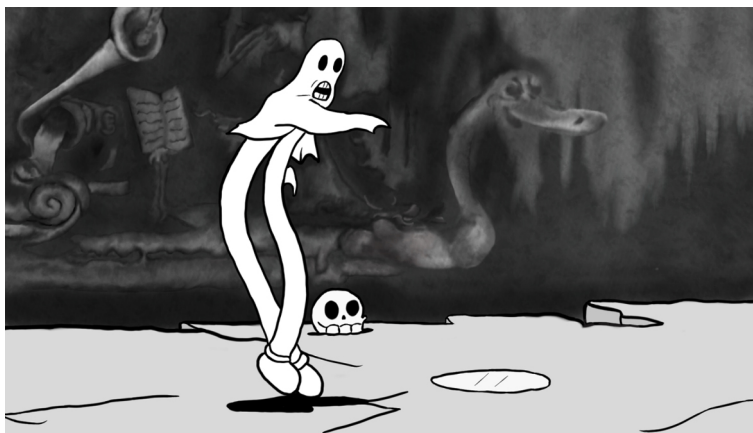


Figure 11. Still frame from Cab Calloway's performance in *Snow White* 1933.
Fleischer Studios
Image: <http://worldcinemaparadise.com/2014/11/09/welcome-to-fleischer-world/>

Snow White (1933)³⁹ is the Fleischer brothers surreal re-telling of the famous fairy tale with Betty Boop in the role of Snow White.

39. Dave and Max Fleischer, *Snow White*, Film (Hollywood CA: Paramount Pictures, 1933)
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLHZruDCAA>>

As her ice coffin (as opposed to the traditional glass one) glides briefly through the home of the seven dwarves, it comes to rest in a cave where Koko the Clown (voiced by Calloway) is turned into a ghost by the wicked stepmother's magic mirror. Koko serenades Betty in her ice-coffin with the song *Saint James Infirmary Blues*.

The surreal turn of this story is effectively heightened in this sequence through Calloway's slow-paced, illusionary dance moves, which are traced into an endlessly transforming and morphing spirit. Calloway's ghost character is exemplary of animation's ability to realise the fantastic⁴⁰, and – as in this instance – to retain the spectre of human motion within the form.⁴¹

Animator, Ralph Bakshi, who created the screen incarnation of Robert Crumb's adult comic character *Fritz The Cat* (1972), has also, broadly, employed the rotoscope technique. Working independently outside the studio system and on minimal budgets, Bakshi has said that he adopted the technique as an economic measure, rotoscoping from stock footage to realise grand battle scenes in his films *Wizards* (1977) and his adaptation of *Lord of the Rings* (1978), as well as other characters dotted throughout his films.

40. In the original sense of the word, meaning something that can only exist in the imagination; like a fantasy.

41. Later this effect was transposed by choreographers into Michael Jackson's famous 'Moonwalk', further appropriated by contemporary street dancers into the dance form that is itself known as 'Animation'.

At the time, Bakshi bore some criticism: rotoscope was viewed by many in the industry as a 'cheat' or dishonest form of animation. But as Bakshi himself pointed out, all of Disney's principal characters were clearly produced this way and, in their time, they were considered the paragon of the form:

You needed live action to assist the (animators) which, by the way, this was no big secret to the guys at Disney who never admitted it. All of the realistic characters in all of their films, starting with *Snow White*, was all live action shots to aid the animators, they just never told anyone, so the poor animators all over the world kept thinking that they were second rate compared to the Disney animators. How did the Disney animators get so good? They had live action references. And then it was used against me as some form of (cheating). *Night on Bald Mountain* from *Fantasia* was a live actor. Might have been [sic] Boris Karloff himself. *Snow White* was live with the prince, *Sleeping Beauty* was shot entirely live. Max Fleischer might have really invented it. I think his KoKo the Clown was live action, I'm not sure.⁴²

Bakshi's fierce independence and belief in the form, as well as his own innovative vision, have contextual relevance to the research. Specifically, Bakshi is referenced here because of his identification of animation's potential as an emotional vehicle. He has commented:

What's important is animation has so many more places to go. I don't see animation being secondary to live action or painting. Art is an emotional thing and animation hasn't even scratched the surface. Adult animation's starting to creep to the forefront now. You call it 'adult' only to give it a goddamn label, which is stupid at this point. Animation should just be able to be animation. Some pictures are animated and some are shot live. There should be no difference between them.⁴³

The technical approach that I have developed comes closest in style to certain rotoscoped passages from the Beatles film *Yellow Submarine*,⁴⁴ (released 1968), directed by George Dunning and Bill Sewell.⁴⁵

42. David Konow, *The Work of Ralph Bakshi: Animation Provocateur*. Posted to blog Adam Savage's TESTED. December 5, 2015.

<<http://www.tested.com/art/movies/459287-work-ralph-bakshi-animation-provocateur/>>

43. Konow, *The Work of Ralph Bakshi: Animation Provocateur*.

44. George Dunning, *Yellow Submarine*, film. (U.K.: United Artists, 1968).

45. Which animator (if indeed either of these and not a lower ranked animation staffer) was most significantly responsible is somewhat contested, therefore in this instance I feel it is important to credit both.

The sequences developed to accompany the song *Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds* have especially strong parallels because of the loose and expressionistic painting that is used.

What made the rotoscoping done in the “Lucy” sequence so special was Dunning’s/Sewell’s approach of loosely painting all over the outlines, using the brush strokes to define the image instead of the outlines, giving it the floaty, fantasy look that made this sequence so breathtakingly memorable.⁴⁶



Figure 12. Still frames from the ‘Fred & Ginger’ section of the ‘Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds’ sequence from *Yellow Submarine* 1968. United Artists.

In this sequence, dancers Charleston and High-kick, a horse wanders slowly through the frame before another horse, adorned in circus plumage, gallops in loops while two male acrobats swing a woman wildly to and fro before letting her fly at the upswing. These images differ from the rotoscoping by Bakshi and the Fleischers in the loose, expressionistic application of paint that does not conform to an outline. Instead it splashes about wildly in and around the figurative elements, creating a fizzing energy out of the ‘boil’ that comes from the haphazard mis-registration between frames. This is most evident in a small section that appears to be rotoscoped from a Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers dance number where the fluffy hem of Rogers’ dress explodes in expressive splashes and flurries of brushstrokes as she is swung through the air.

46. Bob Hieronymous, ‘SPECIAL PROJECT UNIT’ on The Yellow Submarine “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds”, *Hieronymous and Company: 21st Century Radio*. Accessed March 20, 2015. <<http://21stcenturyradio.com/YS/specialprojectunit.html>>

Here lies the source for my own technique, which has made no attempt to replace the source photographic reference underneath but, instead, introduced a new motion element into the image that clings to, emerges from or sometimes masks but never replaces the original figure.

I largely left the photographic figure visible, using the animation to create a kind of supplementary or augmented reality in and around the human body. The 'spectre' is immensely present – still a spectre as much as any photographic representation, its expression spilling out in watercolour, first across a page, then across a screen.

When Krauss described the Surrealists' use of photography as supplementing an 'imprint of the real' she gestured towards a historical awareness that was emergent in photography in the twentieth century, and I would hazard that digitisation has further extended the potential for what she referred to as the photographic supplement.

In my own work I do not seek to exploit digital means to achieve illusion, but deliberately retain the suture lines and seams of my drawing and animation process and embed those gestural aspects within the video, creating new motion from the visible fallibility of the artists hand. Ultimately, this results in the creation of a sigilic emblem of thought through what Krauss refers to as 'the paradoxical writing of the photograph'.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Krauss. 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism'. 34.

There are three references particularly significant to my enquiry that fall in the field of still photography, the overpainted photographs of Annette Messenger, Arnulf Rainer and Gerhard Richter whose treatment of the photographic becomes equally emblematic through their usurping of the lens' vision.

For Messenger, overdrawing, overpainting and writing across her photographs enables her to fill in the gaps in information that the camera lens does not or cannot capture and/or create something new of her own imagination while still keeping one foot in reality. In the catalogue for Messenger's 2015/16 retrospective at Sydney's MCA, *Motion/Emotion*, chief curator Rachael Kent describes the creation of Messenger's *Chimeras* (1982 – 84) that were wound together into the one sprawling installation:

The artist says she had wanted to mix painting and photography together in her practice, something that just wasn't done at the onset of the 80's; painting was considered 'timeless' while photography conversely depicted 'a moment in time'. To present painting and photography together was thus a contradiction something Messenger emphasised by painting in colour over black-and-white photographs taken of her male and female friends; then recombining body parts and mixing genders; male eyes with female mouths, and so forth.⁴⁸

I find contradiction between the camera's eye and the artist's hand to be useful because together this collision creates multiple but integrated realities within a single image. It is everything all at once – the real and the unreal in stratified union.

48. Rachel Kent. 'Annette Messenger: Life Enlarged', *Annette Messenger Motion/Emotion* (Sydney N.S.W. : Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2015), 25.



Figure 13. David Boeno, Annette Messager in her Malakoff studio in 1983, 1983. Silver gelatin photograph.

In the same catalogue Patricia Falguières bundles the *Chimeras* into a series with other works produced from the late 70s and through the 80s; *Le Feuilleton*, *Les Effigies* and *Mes trophées*. These she describes collectively as demonstrating that ‘desire was not the supplement but the *energy of images*’.⁴⁹ She continues:

The photographs are made up, ‘sexualised’ so outrageously as if to defy the neutralised use of photography decreed by conceptual approaches. Such a reversal of ideas (a *contrasens*) is tantamount to identifying photographs as projections, with all the connotations of magical or cinematic fantasy, aggressivity and effectiveness.⁵⁰

In Falguières opinion, Messager *undid the image*.⁵¹ This terminology of ‘undoing’ somewhat substantiates my own musing over my animation process and the Frankenstein mythology. The video itself must be broken down into its constituent parts - literally ‘undone’ - before treatment and re-animation.

49. Patricia Falguières, ‘Fée d’artifice’ *Annette Messager Motion/Emotion* (Sydney N.S.W.: Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2015),

50. Falguières, ‘Fée d’artifice’, 40

51. Falguières, ‘Fée d’artifice’, 41

This post-mortem definition of the process gives it a gravitas that I welcome when dealing with such a potentially esoteric subject. I can approach my making with the seriousness of a surgeon or butcher and the 'slaughter' of the original material can, in more florid moments, be deemed a sacrifice to a new work that is worthy of such a ritual. As overdramatic as such a description may sound, there is a genuine sense of loss in the undoing process, and awareness that the investment of process and materials may yield no satisfactory result. Arnulf Rainer expressed a similar sentiment in discussion of his own over-painted photographs:

This work requires a great deal of sober-mindedness and courage, as the quality already there is in danger of being lost. One wrong brush stroke and the entire image is ruined.⁵²

I admit here to the luxury of a compartmentalised image; an image made of many individual images/frames that allows the 'ruined' image to fall into the texture and context of many others in less time than the blink of an eye. In the preparation of single 2D images I confess I have found this stress almost too great to bear, and my admiration for the mettle of painters, whose every gesture threatens the ruination of a work, has risen tenfold.

Gerhard Richter's overpainted photographs emerge from more casual and domestic source material. Paint is thickly applied over cheap uniformly sized photo prints such as those that populate domestic photo albums.

52. Arnulf Rainer, *Arnulf Rainer: Noch Vor Der Sprache* (Rotterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2000), 152.

Richter obscures and augments his personal history and thus re-constructs alternate narratives.



Figure 14. Gerhard Richter, *Overpainted photograph 17. Nov. 99*, (Circa. 1999)
Oil paint on photograph

In a 2008 publication of the extensive catalogue of these images, Siri

Hustvedt writes:

A painting doesn't "save" a moment in the world. It isn't a document recorded by a machine, but the trace of someone's lived experience that may or may not represent things in the world.

I can't help but feel that Richter's motion - that is what it is after all, the trace of a gesture or gestures - in these pictures make them more true to human feeling and to our visual experience.⁵³

53. Siri Hustvedt, 'Truth and Rightness: Gerhard Richter', *Gerhard Richter: Overpainted Photographs* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 74.



Figure 15. Gerhard Richter, *Overpainted photograph 17. February. 92* (Circa. 1992) Oil paint on photograph.

The subject is not the emotive qualities of the painted image versus the photographic; it is about the channelling of something that is obliquely and ineffably more 'human' that occurs between the indexical and the constructed when these two forms collide materially.

Markus Heizelans describes the effect:

The combination of automatic images in the form of photographs and the semi-automatic overpainting leads to an amazing interplay of commentary between the picture planes. The eye, which was originally focuses [*sic*] on reading the photographic motif, now enters into a lively dialogue with the depths, colour correspondences, and formal relationships. Here the non-representational painting boosts the narrative potential of the photograph by opening up empty spaces for possible interpretations and at the same time filling them up with a certain self-narrative content.⁵⁴

In the catalogue of these images Uwe M. Schneede quotes Richter himself:

"I have," said Richter in an interview in 1991, "taken some little photographs that I smeared with paint. This brings some of these problems together." By "these problems" Richter refers to the relationship between the reality of the photograph and the reality of paint.⁵⁵

...

54. Markus Heizelans, 'Blurring: Gerhard Richter's Overpainted Photographs as Objects of Contemplation', *Gerhard Richter :Overpainted Photographs* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 85.

55. Uwe M Schneede, 'Reality, the Photograph, the Paint, and the Picture', *Gerhard Richter :Overpainted Photographs* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 198.

This simple opposition is cancelled out by a linking process in the meta-pictorial language of the oil-on-photograph works: the intervention withdraws reality from the photograph and the paint becomes a real and powerful object as a result of its emphatic appearance on the screen.⁵⁶

There is an almost parasitic levelling-of-reality process that Schneede describes perfectly here in reference to these works of Richter's. Through the application of paint in my own studio investigations, the photographic video becomes a phantasm while the animation becomes conviction. This push and pull of realities is how I lobby for the existence of the thought-force, visualised in this project as an alternate, previously unseen, reality, hovering over the progression of our more pedestrian existence.

56. Schneede, 'Reality, the Photograph, the Paint, and the Picture', 199.

Chapter 2: Time, rhythm, pulse and repetition

In the earliest phase of this research I defined what I was creating as attempts at depicting time as elastic, non-linear, layered and malleable, both in the way we experience it and in its form. In visual and conceptual terms I conjectured that the term 'time-sea' is more referential to my work than 'time-line'

While the research and my understanding of time evolved into a wider reflection upon the transgressive or transformative force of human thought, ideas of time remain enmeshed throughout the artworks; from the consistent use of a looping structure within the videos and the resultant rhythm and pulse, to their hauntological⁵⁷ styling and content.

Moving image artworks containing performance to video have been at the core of my practice for the past fifteen years. These have largely been single-channel looping pieces with minimal action within the screen-frame and lacking in any traditional narrative. On reflection, my interest in working with looped but singular images came from a desire to create works that spoke directly to the viewer, as with a painting and sculpture, rather than in a form that required an extended viewing commitment.

57. Jacques Derrida's term 'hauntology' is a historical philosophy now translated into a cultural one (operating as a kind of clairvoyant-retroactivity) that stresses that the present can only exist with reference to the past. Derrida first coined the term in *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new international* (1994)

I was less cognizant of video as a media concerned with the eventual, processual and temporal aspects of the art experience through a continuous and relational process of framing and reframing. From very early in my career I wanted my videos to be a constant non-linear image - revolving around within itself in a constant state of becoming -within a gallery, as much an object as any two or three-dimensional work. The loop gave it a constant presence and the general lack of activity contained within them freed a viewer from feeling committed to duration. The viewer may stay with a work for as long as they desire to, as they would a painting, but are freed from feeling they 'missed' something if they leave.

The thesis works rely heavily on a particularly brief, animated GIF-like loop-structure that pulses with an individual rhythmic overlay of photographic pictures and hand-painted imaginings. They are held together by the intent to 'channel' thought and emotion, but also by an empathetic motivation that recognises the pulses as the heartbeats of my own 'monsters' sparked to life by electricity like Victor Frankenstein's own creation.

The animation loops have, through the course of the research, become progressively briefer, yet each contains the labour of many hours, days and weeks. Each gesture or intervention into the original photographic material is recorded and preserved, sustained simultaneously in parallel time-states; the time it elapses onscreen and the time of its making.

The incremental re-working and layering visually embodies the full time-span of the artwork's creation. They are a visual representation of collapsed time.

Simultaneous time-states within the artwork have the effect of representing their simultaneous, parallel planes of existence. This complements the occult logic of their making as well as the resulting (distinctly paranormal) imagery.

2.1 Static image versus motion

I have been consumed with rumination on the subject of time passing: time lost, time accelerated, the experience of time arrested, and time repeated. Time is as invisible as thought: it only becomes visible when we view a record of what happens within it. Motion is the visual key to this record. Broken down into constituent frames of video, each constituent image of a fragment of motion bears witness to something occurring before the lens.

There is a weight in creating a singular image – a tremendous responsibility weighing on a finite chance to make a successful 'picture'. As it elapses, a moving image passes through many states, including the between-frames blur.

The responsibility is shared between all frames to construct something meaningful together. A single frame may appear uninteresting or ugly when viewed as a single image, but in the context of time and motion it exists as an integral and beautiful fragment of 'flow'.

2.2 Labour

Labour is something that I came to fancifully view very early in this project as a form of time machine. It is labour that collapses the time invested into a single outcome. Within the act of labour one can experience this highly elasticated nature of time; when *labour* becomes *laborious* it stretches out far beyond any imagined point of completion, but when labour can be conducted pleurably and with focus, hours may pass unnoticed. I have recently begun to whittle, and am finding great pleasure in a loss of time as I focus simply on a task that is nothing more than creating a stick that is nice to hold. I am also a knitter and take enjoyment from seeing the growth of a piece of fabric from the simple act of creating one stitch, and then another and then another.

I keep my loops brief to ensure the labour is manageable and the work achievable — but just as much for the delicious pleasure of collapsing a couple of months work into a few seconds of screen time. It feels powerful and is as though I may have mastered an aspect of time travel.

2.3 Parallellarrhythmia

Parallellarrhythmia is a work made in 2013 that made an attempt to explore these parallel times more overtly.

It was made in an equally parallel partnership with Tasmanian poet, Anne Morgan (who developed the accompanying poem *Timepiece*⁵⁸) for Bett Gallery's *Poets and Painters 2013: A tribute to Dick Bett*.

When we were introduced and partnered by the gallery, I expressed to Morgan that I was keen to make a work that dealt with the elastic nature of time. It was an interest we shared and we met from time to time checking in on our respective progress.

Morgan's poem complements but does not describe the dual-screen video sequence I produced. Both screens exhibit a shot of my face as I ride down a steep hill on my bike marked by wind force and speed. It is the same sequence animated twice; once in a dramatic painted extension of the natural tears generated by cold wind and velocity and the other (flipped to mirror and running backwards) with painted, laser- like, force emanating from my eyes.

In between the two screens hangs a small handmade paper speaker, styled like some kind of measuring dial and stained in keeping with the spattered animations. It emits an arrhythmic metronome tick that changes speed both suddenly and in gradual increase/decrease, from a CD programmed to play random tracks of differing beats.

58. Appendix III



Figure 16. Video stills from the two *Parallellarrhythmia* screens 2013. Dual channel video loops.

The work explored my musings on time with the image creating time literally ‘racing’ against itself. Time, or more accurately speed, in its more natural form producing strain upon the body, while in the form of its reversal - creating an ability of some kind of super-nature. It manifested time gone haywire, parallel possibilities of the same moments repeating or re-playing.

Morgan’s poem considers an endless reflection on the nature of it all:

*She knows Time’s fickle shapeshifting,
how its arrows can bend, snap or twist and at any moment
become an earthquake seismograph
or a double helix of mating snakes,
where Past and Present intercoil
to create the menace of the Future.⁵⁹*

59. Anne Morgan, *Timepiece* 2013

2.4 An Accident

In 2013, I took the opportunity of a research exhibition titled *Investigations* that was being developed from within my cohort, to explore the idea of labour through some live action experiments. The lengthy nature of animation production meant some concepts were not being explored and I decided some live works would make an excellent functional adjunct to the animation research. They offered a chance to think things through in a more immediate fashion before committing to an animation task.

I began by asking the exhibition co-ordinators for a space that I could occupy within the Plimsoll Gallery (located within the School of Art) and proposed three actions to occur over the three weeks of the exhibition. I began with a plan to first rework a piece by another artist, performance poet Beth Lisick, then rework an older task work of my own and to leave the third week open as something to be developed out of the experience and knowledge of the first two actions. It was the first of these actions, *An Accident*, which best informed the ongoing development of the animated works.

I had a desire to appear as an 'object' and not as a 'performer' in the gallery; to exist in the gallery as if I were a looping video that people would equally attend to or ignore according to their interest - no 'performance silence' was required or requested from other artists installing⁶⁰ or gallery visitors.

This piece was a reworking of Beth Lisick's spoken word element from *Broken Down*, a live artwork by Lisick, Matt Warren and Eli Cruise developed and performed in 2003. Lisick's contribution was the telling and retelling of a story from her childhood of a family car breakdown in the snow. My own version was the repeated telling of the story of a car accident I had had some years earlier. I used event ropes and stanchions to separate myself from the rest of the gallery where work was still being installed and sat in my 'zone' with a P.A. system and microphone repeating the anecdote continually with an intention of continuing until a) the gallery closed or b) it no longer felt necessary to do so.

The basic content of the story was this. Two children ran in front of my car on a busy road. I screeched to a stop and while neither child was actually hurt I did hit one of them. A female witness to the accident stared at me from the side of the road making odd accusatory hand gestures at me. I felt I was being cursed. A woman who emerged from an adjacent shop aided the children and me and their mother was called.

60. A premise of the exhibition was to embrace the 'live' and unfinished nature of research practice and so the exhibition opened before installation was complete.

I was forgiven and the children scolded. The witness (who had followed us in) then attempted to comfort me before asking if I would give her a lift home. In the car she asked to be taken to a friend's house instead, trying to invite me to join her at a party there and making forceful sexual advances. I declined the advances and her request to wait for her, jettisoning her bag and driving away as she stepped indoors.

I chose not to make any audio recording of the action because I feared to record it would make it a more self-conscious action. I just wanted to address the task of talking as simply as possible. I did ask a colleague, Annie Geard, to write a description of what she observed, and she also took photos and made drawings.

Geard's words are reproduced in full in Appendix IV, but the following passage gives an insightful reflection on the purpose of this research overall.

Repetition, perfect form, lovely structure, this is what it is to be human:
Go over a thing again and again - obsessing
To love
To feel sorrow at *almost* hurting someone
To be glad that we have a second chance
To have a child
Sit in sunlight all afternoon
The artist is present...

This personal-perspective form of documentation was valuable and enlightening and I plan to continue to use it as opposed to simply a direct 'record' for the documentation of actions and other works.



Figure 17. Annie Geard, A notebook sketch documenting *An Accident* 2013. Image courtesy the artist.

This action reached what felt like a natural conclusion after four hours.

Through the process of this action, I was able to identify my encounter with the accident witness as a sexual assault, something I had never before considered. This identification happened with the realisation that after several retellings in the gallery I had, without conscious intent, begun to refer to the encounter as a 'sexual assault' – a definition I had not used before in its description, but an accurate one.

Throughout its duration, the process had combined genuine catharsis in recounting the tale and with (most interestingly to me) something I interpret as a touch of Shamanism — new knowledge was gained through the perception-altering effect of the repetitive looping structure of the retelling.

2.5 Loop: repetition and intent

An excerpt from my research journal dated Friday 6 September 2013:

Cue the arrival of a document written by Lisa Cartwright, "The Hands of the Animator: Rotoscopic Projection, Condensation, and Repetition Automatism in the Fleischer Apparatus" which applies the Freudian theory of 'repetition compulsion' to the animation technique of rotoscoping. My own technique is NOT rotoscoping but it is the closest relative to what I do. So viewed in this Freudian light I suddenly find it very easy to connect them [the actions and the animations] through more than simple labour. I also consider the actions (finicky picking and the relentless repetition of a spoken anecdote) as a form of meditation – each action infinitely repeated bringing the mind back to focus, like an action mantra. An exercise that I can apply back to the act of animation also.

I am now imagining a taut line that stretches from the concept of repetition compulsion (and perhaps also to some degree the pleasure principle) to the term 'mantra' and am imagining the work of my PhD research peppered along it falling at neither end, but that taut space between containing sweet spots of supernatural; magick, curse and hoodoo.

Repetition compulsion is a psychological phenomenon defined by Freud in which a person repeats a trauma over and over again, putting oneself repeatedly in similar situations where the event may reoccur, or simply repeating the trauma upon themselves. This happens either in their waking life or in the unconscious dream state or both – his theory being that it provides the opportunity for the person to rehearse an optimal trauma response.

The pleasure principal on the other hand is the driving force of the id – the basic human drive to seek pleasure and avoid pain in order to exist in comfort. It is from this baseline of natural behaviour that repetition compulsion becomes an aberration, yet both are compulsions that will drive a human to repeat.

The studio research, by and large, fulfils this compulsion in its repetitive constructions and mirrors it in the looping forms. Action is revisited again and again as the viewer becomes caught in the rhythm of its loops and the painting process itself (one, then another, then another ad nauseam) allows for rumination and to examine the prescient thought from every angle.

I have given a lot of thought to the looping patterns of mental disorders like PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and psychological treatments such as CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy which trains the patient to observe, examine and redirect negative thought patterns) and the way the rhythm and loop of such things is echoed in the structures of mantra, prayer and the spell/charm casting of witchcraft and pre-Christian ritual practice. It is a structure made of two base parts: repetition and intent.

This basic structure is also the framework for the animations I make and why I began to consider the artworks as sigils. The intent is the genesis of attaining catharsis, meditating upon a single idea or even effecting change through magickal means - primed through the painting ritual and activated through the viewing of the animation. I try to maintain focus on the intent as I work so that the construction of each animation is also a process of intense and dedicated thought. My desire is for this focus to translate through the painting hand gestures and ultimately be read, even if unconsciously, by the viewer's eye as the resultant motion pulses.

2.6 Pulse: the lure of the GIF

The most immediate visual reference for these works can be seen as the animated GIF, a common, small-file-format attention-grabber from the early days of World Wide Web technology in the 1990s that was rediscovered and taken on board by web designers and users in the first decade of the twenty-first century as a fast-loading and user-friendly replacement for flash animations. It is a great format for advertising, communicating memes and snippets of media zeitgeist as well as a tool for creative expression.

In the very earliest stages of the research I considered the novelty and unique possibilities of presenting my work exclusively as GIFs. However the limitations posed by the web browser format, as well as the lack of audio dimension led me to discard this idea.

While dismissing the GIF for its limitations I decided that the ever-shortening loops of its form had something more to offer than simple duration. They operate ‘musically’ upon the eye, possessing rhythm, beat and pulse.

Rosalind Krauss wrote about ‘pulse’ in the discussion of James Coleman’s 1977 film loop work, *Box (ahhahreturnabout)*:

Within “high art”, form is constructed so as to ward off the violence of this beat, to achieve the permanence of the configuration, its imperviousness to assault. It was to this end that Enlightenment philosophy theorized a distinction between spatial and arts, specifying that these two domains were to be held separate from one another. From the point of view of this classicizing perspective, if the pulse were to enter painting at all, it could only be through the highly controlled and mediated rhythms of formal proportion, so that, as in the Golden Section, geometry would take up and purify the effects of repetition.

It is, on the contrary, through the lowest and most vulgar cultural forms that the visual is daily invaded by the pulsatile: the blinking lights of neon signs; the “flip books” through which the visual inert is propelled into the suggestive obscene; the strobe effects of pinball machines and video games – and all of this under-girded by the incessant beat of rock music surging through car stereos or leaking voicelessly through portable headsets.

That the beat surges upward, from low to high, is encoded by Coleman’s use of a boxing match that records the industrialisation of sport. But as much as we might want to thematize this choice, its importance within the context of the formless is its vector, which is to say its reaching upward toward the sublimated condition of form in order to undo that order, and to desubliminate that vision through the shock effect of the beat.⁶¹

It is the pulse or rhythm of the loops that translates my own repetitive action (frame painting) to the viewer, drawing them into its pattern to create the atmosphere, either comfortable or unsettling, and facilitate viewing the same small action for longer than a glance. At its most effective it lulls the viewer into an ideal, open and gnostic⁶² viewing state of either comfort or discomfort and allows the artworks/sigils to fulfil the occult cycle that began in their making.

61. Rosalind E Krauss, ‘Pulse’ *Formless: A User’s Guide* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 1997), 164.

62. The word ‘Gnostic’ is derived from gnosis, the Greek word meaning to know, and usually refers to the acquisition of hidden and mystic knowledge for the greater benefit of mankind. The term ‘gnostic state’ has been used by one of the founders of contemporary Chaos Magick, Peter J. Carroll, to describe altered states of consciousness that he believes to be the key to unlocking one’s magical abilities. I define a gnostic state as one in which consciousness is altered and ‘softened’ – made porous, if you will – in this case by falling into rhythm, allowing for an openness to alternative knowledge and thinking.

Chapter 3: Haunt and Hauntology

3.1 The Surrealist Workshop

Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I “haunt”.

– André Breton, *Nadja*⁶³

Surrealist history places its proponents as the operators of an occult

workshop or laboratory. Baudin states that:

It should be noted that the modern scholarly division between parapsychology on the one hand, and psychology and psychiatry on the other, is a construction that did not exist for the proto-Surrealists, who considered them all one discipline concerned with the mind—as they were too.

...

In the nineteenth century esotericism became greatly politicized, and esoteric societies, many of which adopted practices of secrecy, and esoteric individuals yoked their esotericism to politics of all sides and flavours, and to all manner of (plotted) revolutions. Generally speaking, the result has been that esotericism, historical occultism in particular but also the ‘occult sciences’ in general, have tended to be considered heterodox, countercultural, subversive, or revolutionary; at the very least they have been seen as politically undermining, dissident and dangerous.⁶⁴

The work produced in the course of this project builds upon the Surrealist tradition of politicized esotericism; its later shift from Mediumship towards magick was triggered by political frustration and a feminist mindset. It is both a search for balance, and an embodiment of the second-wave feminist catchcry: *the personal is political*.

Occulting is a term with philosophical roots based in Surrealist practice⁶⁵ and refers simultaneously to a willing immersion in an ‘occultured’ climate and to adopting an esoteric/arcane (arcane meaning ‘mysterious’) modality.

63. André Breton, *Nadja* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 11.

64. T.M. Baudin, *The occultation of Surrealism: a study of the relationship between Bretonian Surrealism and western esotericism* (Amsterdam: Elck Syn Waeron Publishing, 2012) 92.

65. It also has a scientific, usually astronomical, application to describe something hiding another from view.

It has been adopted as the title of this project in reference to the concealed but powerful properties of cognition, to both the *occulture* I describe as my own hauntology and magickal practice, which are implied as well as exercised broadly throughout the research.

Drawing largely on the popular occult imagery that makes up my hauntology,⁶⁶ the works reference these familiar forms to communicate the esoteric and intangible nature of cognition. A process of healing and repurpose, the 'occulting' manifests cognition, 'exorcises' or 'discharges' the energy of negative thoughts such as depression, anger or rumination and harnesses this energy as a generative force for arcane practice through art-making.

The animated forms borrow from and emulate imagery of uncanny phenomena to picture the force of thought – strange energies, spirits, auras and ectoplasm. The evolution of these is what ultimately opened up speculation of a more arcane power held within the creation of these images; the making of artworks as literal spell-casting and the artworks themselves as talismanic charm, curse or object of hoodoo intent. This speculation was significant in the shift in studio process that marked a repurposing and redirection of the works, from objects of mediumship to sigils.

66. My personal, cultural hauntology is constructed of an esoteric assortment of media that has 'stuck with me' from childhood to adulthood, and forms the primary stylistic reference for this research.

3.2 Derrida's Ghosts: Haunted by Media

I believe that ghosts are part of the future... the modern technology of images... like cinema... enhances the power of ghosts and their ability to haunt us.

– Jacques Derrida as himself in *Ghost Dance*, 1983

The word 'haunted' evokes ideas of endless return: it is the thought or mental image that won't leave, the spirit that endlessly revisits, the place one always returns to. To be haunted is to exist within a repeating loop.

Derrida's hauntology is a philosophy of loop; of manifesto and agenda repeating endlessly through history and through this project that idea has translated directly into the re-purposing of the thought-force through both arcane and artistic means, to a greater (as yet unrealised) end of socially conscious action.

While the focus of this enquiry has been to create a moving visual translation of thought and to porously unpack other potential within it, there developed within its parameters a distinct correlation (via the word *haunt*) between the words *thought* and *ghost*. This correlation translated visually (largely due to style drawn from personal hauntology) as well as conceptually.

From a young age, I was interested in anything vaguely paranormal or cryptozoic, an interest spawned and fed by British children's books and the programs that seemed to make up most of ABC TV's after-school viewing of the 1970s.

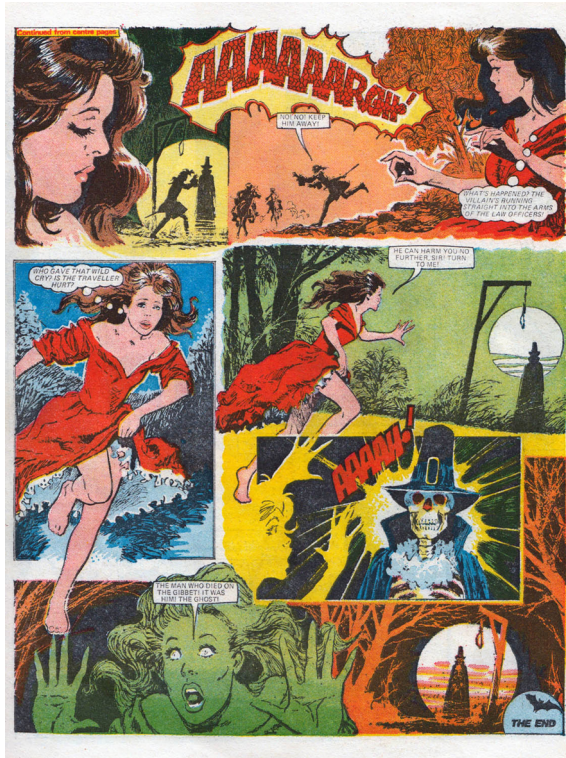


Figure 18. Final climactic page from the story *Skullduggery* in *Misty* No. 18, published May 27, 1978

Image: <http://lewstringer.blogspot.com.au/2016/05/this-week-in-1978-misty.html>

I loved occult subjects – *Tom's Midnight Garden* and *Shadows* produced by BBC and Thames Television respectively as well as books like Ruth Arthurs *A Candle in Her Room*, Catherine Storrs *Marianne Dreams* and the *Misty* comics series. These few examples reflect the dominant *occulture* of the time of my upbringing.

The visual style and tropes of these cultural relics are drawn through from my past and are present in both the style and subject of this research project (where at times the output both *is* and *is about* being haunted) and eventually shifted significantly from works designed as exorcisms of 'haunt' to works that use the force of that haunt as a kind of 'battery charge' of energy for active use in arcane practice.



Figure 19. Stills from title sequence to *Ace of Wands* 1970-72, ITV

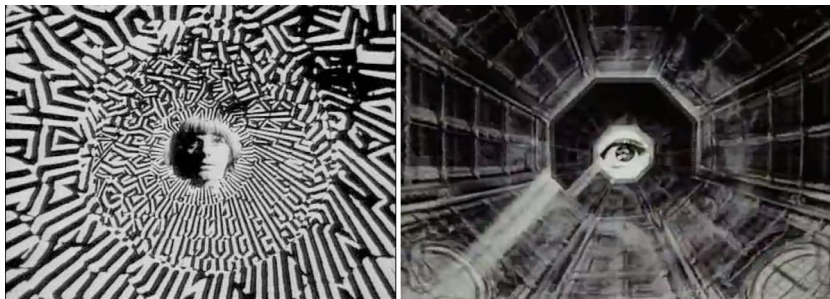


Figure 20. Stills from title sequence to *The Tomorrow People*, Thames Television 1973

In my own examinations of haunt – most directly in the body of works that make up my contribution to the exhibition titled *The Pickup Artists* – the style is entirely reflective of my own cultural haunting. The animations are particularly reminiscent of 70s era television title sequences with the ‘ghosts’ modelled on the known media tropes of the time; cloudy ectoplasms, white-sheet ghosts and haunted objects, but I began with the images of Victorian spirit photography that were heavily featured in popular occult books and encyclopaedias of the period.

This historical aesthetic took greater conscious importance in the earlier stages of the research, although I feel the aesthetic has remained, now inherent as the style of the works.

3.3 Haunting; ghosts made of thought and emotion as force

My first encounters with spirit photography (exemplified by the photographs of William Hope such as those in Figure 21.) were in the many encyclopaedias of 'the uncanny' that I studied as an adolescent. These left me with the impression that, rather than actual depictions of ghosts, what I was seeing were 'ghostings' of emotions that had been created by the subject of the photograph.

In a theory that formed easily and without much analysis, it seemed to me that thought might be powerful enough in the state of grief to render an image of the dear departed onto photographic film. Furthermore, that this phenomenon – materialised thought itself – might be visible even without a camera, and be precisely what others may name as a 'ghost'.



Figure 21. William Hope (1863 – 1933) Man with the spirit of his deceased second wife (L) and Man with a spirit face appearing (R). Both images circa 1920. From the National Media Museum collection, U.K.

While I was without sufficient understanding of available technology and the social milieu of the Victorian era to undertake a more critical reading of these photographs, the 'ghosts' looked so evidently like what I later came to know as doubly exposed images or photomontage.⁶⁷ Rather than disprove my view, these seemed to me perfectly reasonable manifestations of the subject's thought; a physical cloud or aura imprinted with an indistinct portrait. After all, I held an awareness that many of my own memories bore the likeness of photographs taken at the event or of the person rather than the image formed with my own eye. Less distinct spirit forms such as vague white shapes seemed to me to be simply made of less distinct thought.

To my youthful mind, this phenomenon existed because grief was able to register as the most powerful emotion and was therefore capable of producing the clearest 'thought image'⁶⁸. Other thought images may then get less distinct depending on the emotion generated by that thought. This concept framed emotion as some kind of 'battery', capable of charging the clarity of the thought-image; different emotions perhaps valued at varying charge. I felt certain this was possible because I believed that I had seen a 'ghost', and analysing these images in this way allowed me to resolve my own vision to this (arguably) more rational conclusion.

67. Techniques with which I was, at least visually, familiar.

68. In more recent years I became aware that my own interpretation of the 'ghost' experience, the idea that power of thought can generate an image, was explored through the practice of 'thoughtography' in bursts of popularity throughout the twentieth century. While the first known attempts to burn images onto film using thought alone were undertaken in 1910 by an assistant professor of psychology from the University of Tokyo, Tomokichi Fukurai, the most well documented experiments are those of Ted Serios in conjunction with psychiatrist, Jule Eisenbud. While Serios's 'gift' has been debunked on a few occasions, I remain fascinated by his falsified demonstrations of thought as a physical force and maintain interest in the photographs of Serios and Eisenbud these days for their aesthetic representation of the concept; the distinguishing features of odd angles, clouds and fog.

In my adolescence and following the death of my Grandmother, I had what I thought of as a spirit encounter with her. Following a traumatic experience and experiencing a deep sadness alone in my bedroom I clearly saw her presence in the room with me. She stood over me and lifted a hand that I couldn't touch before I wiped my eyes and opened them to find her vanished. In life, I had adored her and in the time since came to view this encounter as one of will rather than visitation – the creation of my own 'thought-image' as a kind of mirage. As my childhood self desired comfort, so comfort came to mind in the image of Grandma as a highly realistic 'mirage' generated by desire and the power of intense emotion.

3.4 A laboratory haunting

In 2014, a team of researchers from the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland conducted a study that reproduced the sensation of feeling a 'presence' that is the sensation that is often attributed to the presence of ghosts. Test subjects (all of whom suffered from some form of mental illness and/or neurological impairment and claimed to have experienced some form of apparition in the past) were blindfolded and asked to place their fingers into a robotic device. As they moved their hands forward, an automated section of the device would also move forward behind them and touch their backs. The subjects quickly became accustomed to the synergy between their movements and that of the light tracing on their backs.

But as the researchers began to experiment with a temporal delay, the participants (unaware of the purpose of the study) felt a 'presence', some experienced a number of 'ghosts' and others became frightened and asked to stop the experiment. Ghosts were perceived – here created within the subjects' mind within a laboratory setting. Study leader Giulio Rognini explained the finding of the study thus:

Our brain possesses several representations of our body in space. Under normal conditions, it is able to assemble a unified self-perception of the self from these representations. But when the system malfunctions because of disease – or, in this case, a robot – this can sometimes create a second representation of one's own body, which is no longer perceived as 'me' but as someone else, a 'presence'.⁶⁹

Rognini's experiment proves how easily consciousness may be displaced and reattributed; how the right (and very real) circumstances create an artificial haunting, borne of a confused identity; ghosts appear out of nowhere.

Reflecting on these subjects – my own 'haunting' and the Swiss study – the idea arises that what we know of as a 'ghost' is a very real phenomenon and a manifestation of energy generated by the immense force of thought. And while thought itself is doubtlessly capable of haunting the thinker, just as with memory itself, whether or not the ghost is real or imagined becomes irrelevant. It is the perception of it that is enough to certify its existence. The ghost then, is a manifestation of thought — our rationalisation of something we cannot see; yet we know (or want to know) is with us. It is an externalisation of a particular firing across the synapses that comes to us, not *to*, but *through* haunt.

69. Olaf Blanke, 'Neuroscientists awaken ghosts... hidden inside the cortex,' Ecole Polytechnique Federale De Lausanne: News, November 6, 2014. < <https://actu.epfl.ch/news/neuroscientists-awaken-ghosts-hidden-in-our-cortex/> >

3.5 The Medium

The content of *The Medium* (the first significant work of the project, produced for my first commercial exhibition at Bett Gallery in 2012) was the visualisation of personal catharsis as a deep and visible breath expulsion. In my mind, its representation resembled the 'ectoplasms' of Victorian spirit photography. This ectoplasm occurs briefly and periodically within a lengthy video loop that contains little movement other than an effervescing hand-painted 'static'.

The length of the video loop (1min 5 sec) made the work cost restrictive and due to this factor, was not possible to achieve on the higher quality watercolour paper I had been forcing through my printer. I undertook many tests on cheaper papers until settling on a nameless, sturdy budget brand that could hold up to the moisture, but it unfortunately lacked the weight to hold colour intensity. This influenced a decision to work with less saturated colours – browns, greys and a touch of blue applied to black and white prints. The black and white prints were again a choice of economy as much as an aesthetic choice. The work was paint textured (spattered) using hand cut cardboard masks to keep the figure clear and the smoke/breath/ectoplasm was hand painted, moving intuitively to create motion from frame to frame. I have developed a pride in this skill of visualising and 'intuiting' the movement as I slowly move through the frames.

The video itself was treated in a number of ways before export and printing ready for painting. Something I had enjoyed about *Ectoplasmic* was its sense of out-of-time-ness, a unique quality to its appearance that made its origin hard to place.



Figure 22. Three frames from *The Medium* 2012, single channel video loop.

The *Medium* video was desaturated to black and white, with some contrast and gamma correction, then also given some digital solarisation (a visual I identify strongly with 1970s video effects as well as experimental films of the mid Twentieth Century; a hauntology of style). It was then overlaid with a film-projector flicker.

While definitely possessed of a 'vintage' feel, the intention was to create works that are of 'all-time' or at least 'many times' so as to transcend the tedious inevitability of technology obsolescence and to avoid works that are easily dated by the visual appearance of their techno-era.

One signifier of this animation process is the occasional printer failure which leads to streaked, striped and blotted prints as ink depletes. I chose to incorporate some of this failure, initially because of my dislike of waste, but in pushing through with it I am delighted by the way it emulates some kind of analogue interference when incorporated into animation. I extended this reference within the audio track (*Ectoplasmic* had been silent) by creating a subtle 'almost nothing' ambience from a recording of an empty room augmented with a sharp hiss and crackle that corresponded to these 'breaks in transmission'.

The Medium was exhibited at Bett Gallery and hung in the same space as *Ectoplasmic* but audience feedback suggested that the work didn't have the same 'allure' as the colour soaked frames of the earlier work. I chose to move forward, working in the briefer style and rhythm reminiscent of animated GIFs so that I could afford to achieve these works with papers of better quality.

Most successful here was the play between the image of myself as an occult 'Medium' and my obsessions and frustrations with the 'medium' I work in. As a term for a human device through which a spirit can communicate, what better homophonic noun could there be but *medium* for the vehicle through which an artist may communicate their ideas? This tension between object and subject was the most interesting and satisfying outcome and established early the position of artist-as-shaman.

3.6 The Pickup Artists

Greetings, my friend. We are all interested in the future, for that is where you and I are going to spend the rest of our lives. And remember, my friend, future events such as these will affect you in the future. You are interested in the unknown, the mysterious, the unexplainable. That is why you are here...⁷⁰

– Opening speech by The Amazing Criswell in *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1957)

This quote opened the exhibition text from the gallery room sheet, co-written with Mish Meijers, for our 2014 ‘double solo’ exhibition titled *The Pickup Artists* at Contemporary Art Tasmania (CAT). Meijers and I were drawn together by a shared interest in the paranormal and desire for both ‘otherworldly’ and audience contact. I conducted my ‘making’ as a search for life after death, as Meijers developed her works as a means for making first contact with an alien life form.

The room sheet continued;

Quests for ‘contact’ could be written off as one of the more ubiquitous fascinations of Generation X(files), but for the contemporary artist who craves communication and response in a community with underutilised channels for critical feedback, searching for a potential new audience is more than a pop-cultural buzz, and searching beyond our known existence could be seen instead as a definite strategy, regardless of whether opinion may classify that search as canny or desperate.

The Pickup Artists is about making new connections but exchanges the bar for a gallery and smooth lines and cocktails for artworks. Here the goal is not a sexual encounter but alien contact or communion with spirits. Tackled respectively by Mish Meijers and Sally Rees, the pursuit of both forms of paranormal entities is tackled by ‘calling’ and ‘luring’; sending out signals and coded visual messages in the hope of garnering some response and using decoys to convince a ‘visitor’ that the gallery may be a safe and welcoming space for them to enter and make their presence known.

Neither artist comfortably wears the mantle of ‘true believer’ nor do they adopt a position of cool atheism towards the paranormal. Both instead firmly identify with the poster from Fox Mulder’s office that stated with optimism ‘I want to believe’ and by activating the gallery and building as both grand antenna and parapsychological field journal, they are keeping the lines of latent communication wide open.

70. *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, film. Writer/director: Ed Wood (U.S.A. :Reynolds Pictures, 1959).

By clarifying my occult-agnostic stance I could move forward from this point in the research project. Agnosticism has since been a permission to play and entertain fanciful ideas as a means to potentially consolidate more penetrating ones.



Figure 23. Mish Meijers and Sally Rees, *Are you there, Neenish?* 2014.
Single channel video loop

The gallery was divided in half with each artist occupying a one side of the gallery each. The division was made by a corridor featuring the principal version of an intersecting video collaboration titled *Are You There, Neenish?* On a screen placed at the end of the entry passage, both artists, vision obscured by glasses that had their lenses replaced by Neenish tarts, call out 'hello' endlessly and mostly optimistically into the air around them.

The same video also featured (at double speed) in CAT's project room outside the main gallery in what we referred to as *The Pickup Artist Radio Room* - accompanied by a mirror ball and a Spotify playlist of songs about visitations, hauntings, calling, ghosts and aliens.

At night it featured again (this time at 20% of the original speed and highly 'effected') projected into the buildings street-front windows and (modestly) amplified into the street; the slowed calls resembling whale song, a loosely coded version of itself ready to be unscrambled by the right entity.

Again from the room sheet :

The entry corridor dividing *The Pick-Up Artists* exhibition space becomes both a decompression chamber and the point of conceptual crossover – a preparatory space and waiting room that contains the pregnant question at the crux of the matter: Is there anybody there?

The far end of this corridor opened out onto two, clear directional possibilities with a hard line cleaving the gallery into a dark, black painted side (Rees) and a glaringly bright white side (Meijers)⁷¹.

Placed just high enough to force the visitor to look up, twin, concave visibility mirrors hung in echo of the Neenish spectacles and offered a fish-eyed glimpse of what each room contained to assist a visitor to make their navigational choices.

71. Meijers' section manifested as an absurd and joyous installation of interconnected objects – the centrepiece an intensely airbrushed, alien-hunting panel-van containing both a succulent garden and a video projection surrounded by lenticular photographs and still and kinetic sculptures which created the larger installation whose purpose was to call and communicate with ETI (Extra Terrestrial Intelligence). She paid some homage to the Golden Record and described the random nature of her images as a series of desperate attempts to both draw attention (the installation was blindingly, dazzlingly bright and in constant motion) and to crack some unknown code through its haphazard combinations.



Figure 24. Mish Meijers and Sally Rees, *The Pickup Artists* 2014.
Installation view, Contemporary Art Tasmania

My work in the darkened chamber began with the premise that the contemporary spirit is a media-savvy entity, well aware of the cultural trappings of ghost-imagery - the draped sheet with eyeholes, ectoplasm, realm transgression via mediums (as viewed through spirit photography) and poltergeist activity. This aesthetic-rhetoric became the beginning of my search for connection with the spirit world and the model for a number of artworks that also operated as 'ghost decoys'.

The result comprised of hovering figures and various on-screen or projected 'presence tests', 'haunted' objects and a visitor-powered, 'possessed' chandelier – which may have given the impression of a novelty haunted-house, but its purpose was not to spook the living, human visitor.

Instead, in the manner of a decoy duck, its aim was to create a welcoming environment for spirits and ghost-forms by suggesting other spirits are already in situ. This was articulated by presenting guises that a spirit may *expect* to find from a living human attempting contact and drawing on the media and pop cultural knowledge they may have retained from their earlier, carnal existence. These works together presented as a collection of artificial, spiritual manifestations devised as a kind of laboratory to suggest a space that other spirits will enter. Two 'ghost decoys', *Flying Horse Spirit* and *Garage Spirit* are included in the thesis, along with the discharging and conjured ectoplasm of *Arms for Animating Architecture* and *Summomings (various)*.

Created using the same paper and muted palette as *The Medium*, *Flying Horse Spirit (FHS)* was created to further experiment with animation 'boil'. I performed to video a single dip and arm-flap with the intention of creating an endless loop, removed the lower half of my body digitally and my oversized shirt was painted to a hovering splattered trail, essentially becoming the stock, pop-culture signifier, 'sheet ghost'. In an attempt to return some spontaneity to the enervating process of animation and with the low risk of cheaper materials, I added a rubber stamped print of a bucking horse to my face in every frame.



Figure 25. *Flying Horse Spirit* 2013. Single channel video loop

When animated, its casual mis-registration creates the 'boil'; it jitters and quivers like a hyperactive, representational aura. The horse itself has no specific reference and was selected at random, but its manifestation as some kind of mutation of occult spirit force was an unexpected outcome creating an image that (literally) hovers between animal spirit guide and imagined post-mortality portrait. The automatist act of random image selection of the horse significantly occulted the process of this work's making.

In this exhibition, *FHS* was presented on a screen hung high on the wall and angled down to the viewer whose gaze was forced to look up (a kind of forced reverence borrowed from church design observed through my Catholic childhood) but the modest sized screen and distance undermined this. I had previously tested this work as a large projection where the scale gave the work significantly more presence and grandeur. This latter format is the form the work takes for the thesis submission.

I had intended to create a human-scaled sculptural ghost by draping a tethered helium-filled balloon in a light white sheet but studio experiments failed to produce the desired effect. After several attempts I adopted the form of video instead with the balloon present under an animated shroud. I chose to shoot *Garage Spirit* in a concrete garage that was beautifully proscenium-like and located at the end of a dead-end street.



Figure 26. *Garage Spirit* 2014. Single channel video loop

The video captures the ethereal loveliness of the balloons natural drift while tethered in the empty space and the animation process, slightly more representational than usual, in tandem with the absence of my own image, made this work a refreshing transposition of the forms I had been exploring.

Arms for Animating Architecture (AAA) was made much briefer and faster than previous works for the initial purpose of quickly moving some ideas forward after the drawn-out process of making *The Medium* and the subsequent recovery/reading/processing period over the following summer.

AAA depicts the thought-force, discharging from the body and becoming something external. Completed over only a week, I shot my arm outstretched with wiggling 'twinkle fingers' in the studio and took a very small loop to animate.

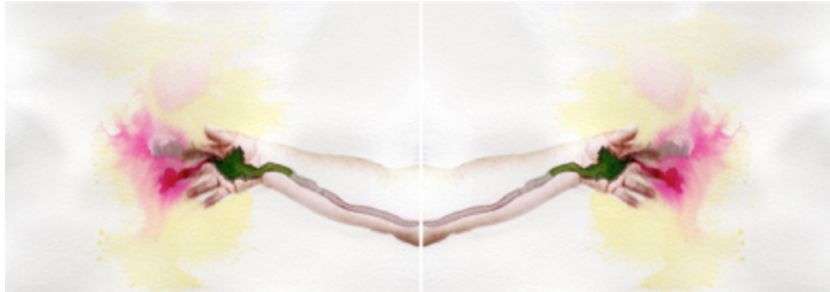


Figure 27. Digital mockup of *Arms for Animating Architecture* 2013.
Dual channel video loops.

Moving to experiment with watercolour inks (as opposed to the more thickly textured tubes) I also decided to retain the colour of the original video image. I returned to something of the idea of the genesis-work *Ectoplasmic*, to simply use the paint to produce a 'force'; as if the paint realises something that already exists, invisible to the camera.

The result is electric and energetic; so energetic, that the finger motion seems quite subdued by comparison, but I also enjoyed the slow process of the discovery of that movement under the paint when viewing.

I envisioned this work mirrored on two screens or projections either side of a doorway or architectural feature. It seemed to me that these enchanting, open arms marking out an entryway could be used to create a welcome and promise in a space that lacked these things; the signifier of a blessing on those who pass through it.

I felt the electrical ectoplasm of *AAA* had a place within *The Pickup Artists* but lacked the optimal architectural space.

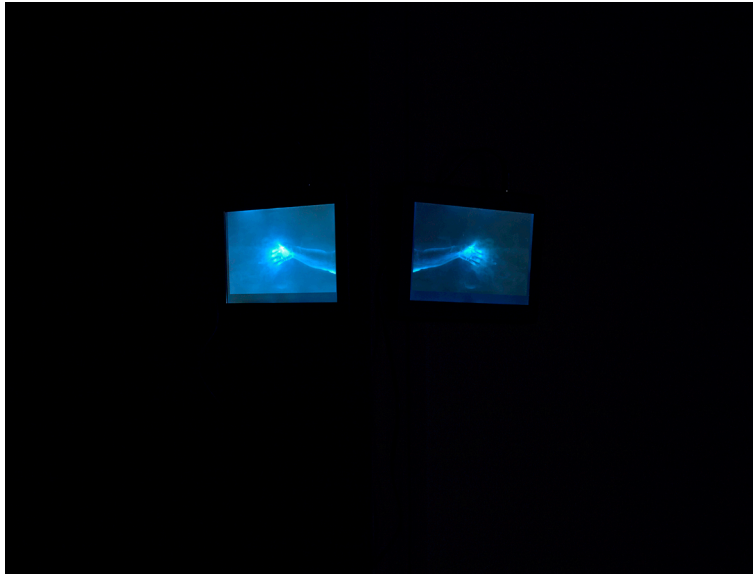


Figure 28. *AAA (inverse)* 2014. Dual channel video loops, installation view, Contemporary Art Tasmania

To ‘embed’ *AAA* in the darkened gallery space I digitally inverted the colour palette resulting in an almost neon animation over a black background.⁷² I installed *AAA* on two small tablets mounted towards each other in a corner. The intense colour made the works vibrate in the space and drew the eye despite their small size.

Summonings (various) is another iteration on the ‘Medium’ and spirit photography trope and another attempt at visualising ‘expulsion’. Two screens depict a Medium being repeatedly disrupted from a state of calm contemplation by a retching that produces a cloud of ectoplasm. She then critically examines each by sight before it fades away and marks the beginning of another sequence of ectoplasm ‘production’.

72. In the thesis exhibition, the work is installed in its original form.

The images are high-contrast black and white and, as each ectoplasm fully emerges, it glows with a flickering animated hue. Installed as a dual channel work, each screen was floor mounted in portrait format. Protruding into the space and utilizing the mirror positioning they shared the complete series of 'retchings' as two cycling loops.



Figure 29. *Summonings (various)* 2014. Dual channel video loops, installation view, Contemporary Art Tasmania



Figure 30. Composite image of the two screens of *Summonings (various)* 2014. Dual channel video loops

In the spirit (no pun intended) of parlour spirit photography there is a distinct technological illusion. In the studio, I loosely threaded clouds of fairy floss from black thread and suspended them against the black backdrop. In front of the camera I would gaze upon them and then lean in and devour them as best I could without using my hands, resting serenely with closed eyes once consumed. Run backwards, the footage appears instead as a process of regurgitation.

The work was also an experiment in using the loose and splashy animated form I had been developing, in a more subtle and abstract fashion. Using Besant's *Thought-Forms*⁷³ as a guide I worked up three textured schemes based on her thematic colouration key chart. Using the opportunity for symbolic aspiration I chose a brown-tinged rose pink for 'unselfish affection', a light sky blue for 'devotion to a noble ideal' and a clear yellow for 'highest intellect'.

As a result, whilst exploring a thematic and style with the 'summoning' of each ectoplasmic form, I was also summoning these qualities for myself. It is this kind of thinking – a desire for the work to operate outside of its physical constraints – that happens around the animation process that led to the final stages of the project with its focus on magickal practice.

73. Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1905)

While this work bears significant difference to other submitted thesis works (mostly due to its visual weighting of the indexical image over the constructed), it is included in the thesis for the way it evidences aspects of synthesis and ritual even if in a significantly altered form.

Two other works included in this exhibition were omitted from the thesis on the basis that they do not exemplify the qualities I was able to identify upon reflection and towards the end of the project – the synthesis of the indexical and the constructed (the photographic and the graphic) and a discernible pulse as well as the ritual process of making – as integral to the central studio research thread of screen occultation.

These works, *Hilltop Spook* and *Shivers* are worth a brief mention despite their absence from the thesis exhibition as they greatly informed many of the considerations required of the thesis exhibition design.

Hilltop Spook was shot directly to HD video with no frame-by-frame animation process taken. In the earliest development phase of the exhibition, the source video was shot during a lively research/play session with Meijers at Alexandra Battery in Sandy Bay. I shot no other usable footage that day but was delighted by the way the ghost sheet crumpled, my figure appearing to have vanished entirely, as I dropped to the ground on the sharp slope of the hillside.

I had become concerned that my works, when exhibited together, may create a confusing space where the amassed effect of chatter and pulse could distance the viewer and prevent works from being read. It seemed to me that a strategic return to a significantly longer format would be required for some loops, in order to ‘pace the space’. *Hilltop Spook*’s loop runs around 15 minutes in length and for the bulk of this time the screen only displays the sheet, bundled on the ground, rumpling back and forth to the sound of a low, warbling theremin. At one point in the loop the footage runs longer (and backwards) so that the sheet ghost appears to rise out of the pile and hover over the landscape briefly accompanied by a shrieking rise in theremin pitch and volume, before (reversed again) the figure falls back into its continually rumpling pile.



Figure 31. *Hilltop Spook* 2014. Single channel video loop

Hilltop Spook was projected at the largest possible scale on the end wall of the gallery and became the ‘mood’ and created the ambience of the space – a simmering constant that only occasionally demanded audience attention. This was integral to later considerations for the thesis exhibition.

Shivers, a sculptural installation under the floor of the gallery took its form from the opening scenes of the second film of Dario Argento's *Three Mothers* witch trilogy, *Inferno* (1980). The character of Rose explores the basement of her apartment building only to find a hole in the floor that reveals a flooded ballroom below. She accidentally drops her keys and dives into the hole to retrieve them, eventually finding herself accompanied by a floating human corpse that she frantically tries to escape from.

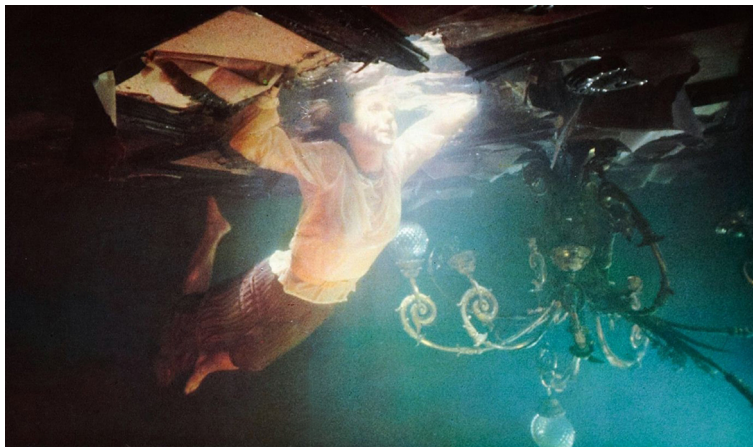


Figure 32. Irene Miracle as Rose Elliot in *Inferno* 1980. Dir. Dario Argento

I decided to utilise the gallery's considerable under-floor area to hang a brightly lit chandelier (a trope of the grand haunted mansion) under the floorboards. The chandelier was viewed via a faux-rococo style mirror placed below an open manhole in the corner of the gallery. The chandelier was connected to a golden, tasselled rope that ran up through the floor on the opposite side of the space, over a pulley and hung tantalisingly at the spaces entrance just at the end of the corridor. It was a device that successfully communicated, only through its presence, to the viewer that they should pull it.



Figure 33. *Shivers* 2014. Chandelier, mirror. Installation view, Contemporary Art Tasmania

While the chandelier was not visible from this position, by the time the viewer had crossed the floor, drawn to the light glowing from the corner manhole, the chandelier would still be swinging and shimmering as if shaken by a poltergeist.

A shortage of time led me to abandon a plan to position a microphone under the floor to carry the sound of the tinkling, crystal pendants in motion, which was a decision I regret in retrospect. The ‘liveness’ and randomness of a real-time audio response to the rope-pull would have given a valuable texture to the general soundscape in the room and given more clarity to the experience of the action/reaction for the viewer.

These considerations of aural texture in the wake of this installation have greatly informed the installation of the thesis exhibition. I have a better understanding of a need to ‘break up’ the patterns of aural loops from time to time, interrupting their familiarity so they are still ‘heard’.

This was approached through some re-timing and orchestration of the thesis works against one another. Some animated loops have been brought in and out of 'manifestation' (fading in and out of more passive states between long cycles of many loops) or 're-spaced' so that their most active phases occur in sparser repetition in order, to keep the soundscape textured and fluid.

Within a space filled with multiple screens, each emitting light from a reflective surface and audio at various levels and intensities (some works are silent), works can interfere with each other detrimentally if not given appropriate consideration. In some galleries these problems may be solved by screening works in a sequential program, giving each work a discreet space of its own or relegating sound to the use of headphones. Each of these measures however, prevent works from being read in conversation with others, interfere in the eternity of the loop or prevent work being experienced from the outset as a whole.

My preference in exhibition design is for an open space, an awareness of how works reflect (both literally and artistically) upon each other and a careful consideration ensuring variability, texture and moments of silence in the collected soundtracks to prevent the feeling of walking into a cacophonous hive of noise and light pulsing upon entering the gallery. The aim is to, quite literally, orchestrate the sound and light emitted into a holistic ecology.

Within *The Pickup Artists* the large projection of *Hilltop Spook* was used to set a tone for the whole room, its relatively elongated loop emitting audio of a low wavering theremin tone that was able to function as a 'base note' for the room, picking up to a higher and louder intensity with its action every fifteen minutes or so. Most works amongst the installation emitted a constant drone, even though made up of different textures and I made note that a greater proportion of 'spot effects' coming from other works would have given greater aural 'texture' to the overall installation. I particularly regretted having not amplified the live sound coming from the tinkling *Shivers* chandelier, which would have added an irregular, punctuating texture to the rhythmic pulsing around it.

Projection is often considered the preferred vehicle for moving image works, largely for its flexibility of scale and the potential for human interaction; there is considerable delight as a gallery visitor, in finding where you interrupt the screen and letting the image fall across your own body. The impact of a wall-sized image is impressive, but there is also a distinct loss in image resolution and images are highly compromised by any light leak.

But screens, particularly large screens at human scale, can still elicit a sympathetic and bodily response and they operate much more flexibly in a variety of light conditions. The screens display at a greater resolution and play the, arguably, more interesting role of being objects as well as the moving image they contain.

They make no illusion in the way a projection does and so are possessed of an inherent honesty, a trustworthiness that appeals and assists the audience to suspend disbelief within an exhibition space. In the instance of this submission, the screens facilitate a closer engagement with a works individual purpose or intent.

The technology essential to the communication of the artworks was not used here for the primary purpose of creating an illusion (the monitor as the figure of a frame or window, the projection as a trompe l'oeil portal to virtual space). While I acknowledge that all animation is illusion to some extent, to engage too heavily with illusion or visual tricks may have undermined any successful realisation of the intent of this collection of works (or, eventually, the thesis submission) as affective objects.

The lack of intent to create illusion or the lack of an attempt to persuade is a deliberate device to diminish the audience's technically critical role – whether or not an illusion is convincing is not a decision that needs to be made and they are free to simply bear witness to the work and fall into its rhythms.

3.7 Monsterring

Anger is an energy.

– John Lydon. *Rise*⁷⁴

In May 2015, my second commercial exhibition was launched, again at Bett Gallery.

74. John Lydon, *Rise*, audio recording (London: Virgin, 1986).

This exhibition, *Monsterring (and other thoughtforms)*, consisted of three video loops and six hand-painted, unique state prints. I often sketch out animation ideas over photographs and this seemed a good opportunity to try creating watercolour painted photographs as unique, resolved works. The painted photographs are omitted from the thesis exhibition. Their making is early in form, less confident and less resolved than the videos as well as being devoid of the necessary ritual and rhythm of the animations.

The collected works continue to use watercolour inks to depict the energy of thought in various levels of 'harness', from an uncontrolled force of disfigurement to a more functional channelled power (even if of uncertain purpose). The inks used in animation and over photographic prints awkwardly restrain and coax the disfigurement making a visual analogy of the cognitive process itself. The imagery is reminiscent of Kirilian and aura photography, science fiction graphics and again, Besant's *Thought-Forms*.

The three video works are some of the most succinct pieces produced in the course of this enquiry. *The Optimist* presents a figure who gazes upward into a clear white screen-space from a scrambling, pooling black-ink cloud that engulfs the lower body and face like a moving swarm, accompanied by a subtle soundtrack of breath as the chest gently rises and falls.



Figure 34. *The Optimist* 2015. Single channel video loop

A bright yellow glow emits from the mouth. The ink engulfs and recedes but the eyes remain steadfastly clear, gazing up and outwards from the current state. The figure is passive, but not consumed.

In *Grind* the figure's jaw slides angrily back and forth from side to side to a painfully scraping audio (metal on concrete). The painted energy here veils the entire figure in swampy dark greens, reds and browns that rise like steam from the top of the head as the figure is occasionally completely removed from its human reference, entirely deformed by paint. Teal-ringed eyes and cross-hatched teeth remain as a reference to what was, as the figure disappears completely each time into a monsterisation.

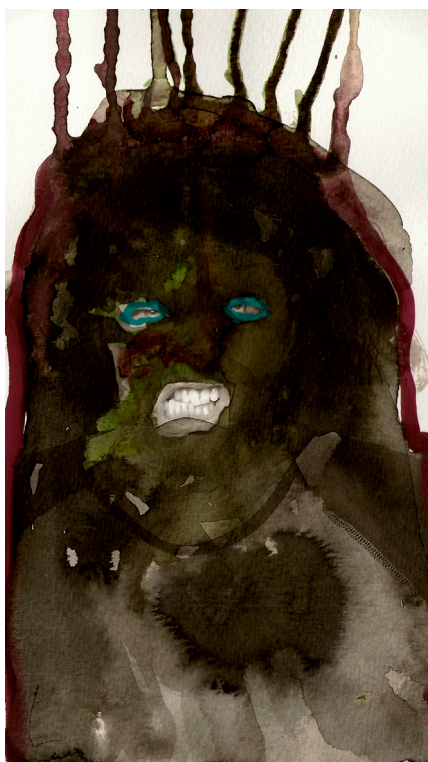


Figure 35. *Grind* 2015. Single channel video loop

Grind was the first animation to be returned to the studio, for a second iteration. The translucency of watercolour failed to provide the required level of ‘swampiness’ and obfuscation in its first attempt/incarnation. This need to re-do (usually a work that seems a clear failure would be simply discarded) was unique amongst the growing body of work resulting in an animation I find powerful and that was particularly influenced by Arnulf Rainer’s overpainted photographs. Whilst his artistic drive is one of seeking perfection, or in his own definition *correcting* and removing the imperfection, mine here is closer to translation and externalisation. I identify with Rainer’s statement about overpainting that it was “never my intention to destroy, only to make complete”⁷⁵.

75. Arnulf Rainer, *Arnulf Rainer: Noch Vor Der Sprache* (Rotterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2000), 151.



Figure 36. Sissy Spacek as the title role in *Carrie* 1976. Dir. Brian de Palma

It is *Grind* that most closely depicts the type of force that powers Carrie White's psychokinetic 'gift' in King's novel and De Palma's cinema adaptation. Here is a dark brooding anger that clenches the jaw and drapes the figure in an incessant murk. It was not until the point of coming to curate the thesis submission that I realised there was an inversion of *Carrie's* signature image and the flashpoint of her greatest humiliation and rage – the girl dripping in pigs blood after a cruel prank takes place at her high school prom.

The furious figure in *Grind* is surrounded by a 'rage-halo' of red drips mirroring the moment of ignition of Carrie White's psychotic, telekinetic episode. In the weightless space typical of these animations, however, the drips energetically radiate from the head and drip outwards rather than down.

Zap Zap took the knowledge gained from *Hilltop Spook* (and its role in a larger installation) to present a more broadly spaced loop. Here the figure rests towards the bottom of the screen in a white space with a brushstroke 'wimble' obscuring all but the hands, hair and face. The fingers appear to pinch the eyes closed as the white paint boils and the figure twitches slightly. From time to time the eyes open wide, shooting bright orange/yellow beams into the screen space above with an electrical zapping before pinching closed again. Here the thought-force is harnessed and converted into beams of energy by the figure instead of allowing it to engulf her, but it takes effort to control. *Zap Zap* is the indicator of a significant shift in the works. Where the figure has previously been a more passive identity to whom things happen, in *Zap Zap* she becomes other; manifesting an ecstatic state to make things happen.



Figure 37. *Zap Zap* 2015. Single channel video loop

For the thesis exhibition, this work is re-edited to further extend the work's 'passive' phase before the eyes open, taking the work into a much longer loop and intensifying the effect (in sound and vision) of the harnessed energy 'rays'.

Despite being absent from the thesis, the following painted photographs from the *Monstering* exhibition are mentioned here for the manner in which they shore up the visual and conceptual ideas of other thesis works.

Like *Zap Zap*, *The Telekinete* and *Second Sight* depict thought in harness. The former demonstrates it as a lifting force and the latter shows something less skilfully controlled; the natural eyes showing the strain of effort obscured by red-coloured pools while a second set of strangely vacant eyes in the forehead send out different coloured beams. *The Telekinete* operates as a demonstration of possibility; *Second Sight* as a cautionary tale.



Figure 38. *The Telekinete* (L) and *Second Sight* (R) both 2015.
Both images watercolour over inkjet print, 59.4 x 42 cm

Both *Aura* works are simple depictions of the thought-force emanating from the position of the third eye and use the same photograph as their base. They strongly resemble Besant's thought-forms in appearance, while the composition is based on that of an 'aura photograph' I had taken at a Psychic Expo some time in the first decade of the 2000s.



Figure 39. *Aura (pink)* (L) and *Aura (yellow)* (R) both 2015.
Both images watercolour over inkjet print, 59.4 x 42 cm

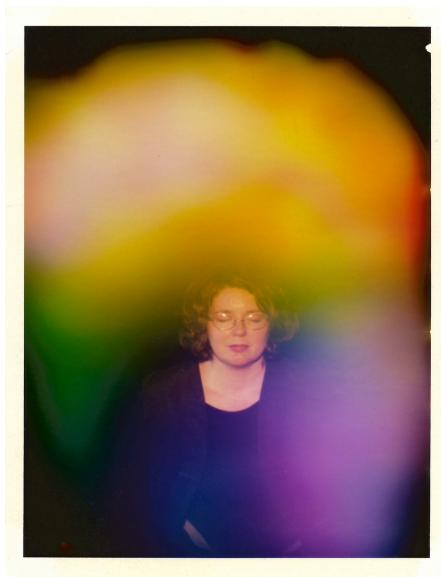


Figure 40. Image taken by unknown aura photographer at the Hobart Psychic Expo, circa 2000

Fury Marsupial is a partner work to *Grind*. Like *Grind*, it is a depiction of a 'shadow' identity deformed by the thought-force of rage in a furious cloud of blue and brown that creates a mask, leaving only angrily expressive eyes and bared teeth revealed. Both works exhibit a Jungian reconciliation at play; an acknowledgement of the shadow self.

Jung claimed:

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge.⁷⁶



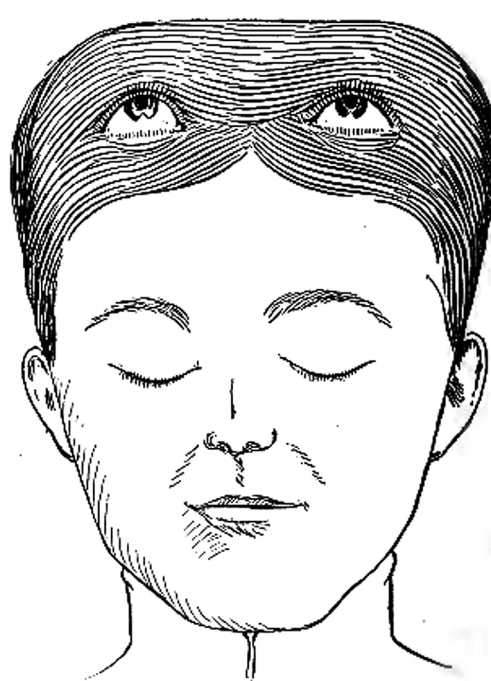
Figure 41. *Fury Marsupial* 2015. Watercolour over inkjet print, 59.4 x 42 cm

The shadow self is the driving force of both *Grind* and *Fury Marsupial* and an acknowledgement of that which is usually suppressed.

76. Carl Jung, 'Phenomenology of the Self: II The Shadow', *The Portable Jung*. (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 145.

The Eyes We See Ghosts With is something of an anomaly amongst this group in that it relates directly to no other work in the show. It is based on an image from a 1902 phrenological publication *Vaught's Practical Character Reader* that is captioned "WHAT WE SEE GHOSTS WITH. Our Spiritual Eyes."⁷⁷

For my own purposes it seemed an appropriate figure to demonstrate that the intent to find ghosts creates the means through which to find them. A second pair of either real or symbolic eyes is positioned in the upper forehead; a positive deformation or 'monsterring' of the human form in order to access a higher plane of the spirit world.



WHAT WE SEE GHOSTS WITH.

Our Spiritual Eyes.

Figure 42. Image from page 158, *Vaughts Practical Character Reader*

77. Vaught, L.A., *Vaught's Practical Character Reader*, (Chicago: L.A. Vaught, 1902), 158.

My connection between 'thought' and 'haunt' had become inextricable by this stage and in retrospect I view this image – the last produced for the exhibition – as a bridge between the passive and the active. The figure is literally haunted, obscured by a translucent ghost form, but instead of passively succumbing, uses a gift of supernature to communicate and observe her own haunting.



Figure 43. *The Eyes We See Ghosts With* 2015. Watercolour over inkjet print, 59.4 x 42 cm

Reflecting upon this work from the closing stages of the project it enabled me to reconcile the two emergent phases of the research — the haunted/shamanic and the shamanic/magick — as a progression as opposed to two exclusive and divergent threads.

This exhibition, and in particular the three video works, mark the most significant shift to have taken place in the studio research that changed the works from passive to active – from shamanic exorcisms of the haunted to batteries of harnessed energy for magick workings.

3.8 Allport: Unhoused

In June 2016, an exhibition *Unhoused* featuring two new works of mine launched at the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Art in Hobart. Curated by Emily Bullock, *Unhoused* invited Linda Fredheim, Julie Gough, Brigita Ozolins, Elissa Ritson and myself to respond to the Allport family collection, by interaction with the collections objects, over the entirety of the exhibition spaces.

The Allport houses its permanent collection in ‘rooms’ that emulate domestic spaces in a series of proscenium bays with its historic library behind. The exhibition offered a new way of bringing artists in, allowing the works spill out from its front gallery and into the historic displays and library behind. It was the curator’s intent for the artists to ‘haunt’ the venue with site-specific works — to unsettle the permanent displays by disrupting the familiar objects, sounds, lighting and arrangements.

In researching the exhibition I developed affection for the artist and colonial matriarch Mary Morten Allport and developed a curiosity about a literal dead end on the museums wall-sized family tree – the words *four other sons died young*.

All the artists were given some access to portions of the collection still in storage and I was directed to a section of Mary's journal that yielded more information on one of these sons, Gordon Allport, who drowned at the age of five, one of the 'four other sons' from the museums didactic panel. This was the age of my own son at the time of reading and I became deeply and emotionally invested in the forgetting of Gordon and equally in Mary's maternal grief. Our shared roles as both artist and mother rang loudly.

I became haunted by the absence of Gordon within the museum and a small amount of digging in the collection unearthed Mary's sketched portraits of him, one for nearly every year of his life as well as exquisite painted miniatures that, while difficult to confirm, by date and comparison to the named sketches would appear to be of Gordon also.⁷⁸

In addition, Gordon's OWN paintings of flowers (he must have watched his mother – a very talented botanical artist) were unearthed in a scrapbook Mary had named her 'Book of Treasures'. They were displayed in a case within the gallery for the duration of this exhibition, preserved as freshly as when they were first painted and looking exactly like something my own son might have brought home from school.

78. The miniature I used in reproduction is unsigned and can only be attributed to Mary Morten Allport in light of her other miniatures. I made the leap from Mary's named sketches and other portraits of her children that this image was a portrait of Gordon. It was gratifying upon checking the correct details of attribution for this exegesis, that the, previously untitled, image is now listed in the collections online catalogue as (*Gordon Allport*) with the note *Identified from sketch by Mary Morton Allport in her Book of Treasures*.

Absorbing this material and reading the document of Mary's own journals, I grieved Gordon's absence in the family history and became consumed by Mary's grief for her child. Mary's journal notes her finding a forgotten memorandum dated November 14 1850 that tragically describes mistaking the sounds of distant peacocks for the cries of her son's tormented spirit in the weeks following his funeral.

Yesterday they carried my little darling to his grave – At night I had left Minnie in her room, and went out of my own window into the moonlight – I heard a faint “Mama” in Minnie's voice, and thought she had heard my footstep and called me from her window – Grouse too picked up his ears, and looked towards that end of the house – I ran in to beg she would not stand in the night air, but her window was shut, and she saying her prayers – then I thought it was Curzon wanted me, but he was in the dining room, and the shutters closed – then, too late, I rushed out, and looked up and all round; their voices were so much alike; but there was nothing – For six weeks I believed I had heard poor Gordon's voice; but with such a mournful sound, not like a little happy spirit going home; I began to ponder on the possible truth of the old stories of Fairyland, and that my lost darling had been stolen only for a time. At last I heard a sound in the day-time so like, that I was convinced it was the cry of a distant Peacock, I had heard; and thanked God sincerely for removing such a load of doubt from my mind.⁷⁹

I felt the heavy presence of the objects collected by the family including Mary's own harp and the cabinets of crystal glassware situated opposite in the museum. All the objects have been held in an intimate relationship with the hands and mouths of the Allport family and their friends. The loss of Gordon is held in the history of these intensely handled, domestic objects and so they, as well as the peacock cry became the motifs of my work for this exhibition.

79. From the journal of Mary Morten Allport, dated on the second anniversary of the Gordon's death.

Located in the gallery, *For Six Weeks I Believed I Had Heard Poor Gordon's Voice (after Mary Morten Allport)* is a simple, silent video loop with accompanying objects that is based on one of the miniature portraits that the museum attributes to her and takes its title from her own words.

Ribbons of dark colouration leach endlessly from the image like smoke⁸⁰ in front of the image, a crystal goblet on a dark wooden stand resonated peacock cries from a small speaker inside. To the other side of the image a significant stack of apparently blank papers sat on the floor.



Figure 44. *For Six Weeks I Believed I Had Heard Poor Gordon's Voice (after Mary Morten Allport)* 2016. Single channel video loop with mixed media. Photo: Linda Fredheim.

80. They are in fact smoke, rising from burning incense and shot against a black background. This footage was inverted and overlaid many times to create the multiple 'leaks' from the image.

Weighted down with a lace handkerchief full of lead, visitors were welcome to take a page away and use a mirror to discover the faint reversed text that is Mary's journal entry regarding her fears for Gordon's ghost and eventual relief in a passage that neatly describes the universal process and progression of human grief.



Figure 45. Image attributed to Mary Morten Allport, unsigned, undated and untitled, watercolour on ivory, 4 x 4cm, Image courtesy the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (L) and still from Single channel video loop *For Six Weeks I Believed I Had Heard Poor Gordon's Voice (after Mary Morten Allport) 2016* (R)

Slow Serenade for Gordon's Transation (after Elias Perish Alvars) (2016) is an audio composition for intervention in the museum display that is created to emulate Mary's music room. The work is a 'remix' of Alvars harp composition, *Serenade*. Alvars was a British harpist and composer of the Victorian era and while it appears none of Mary's own sheet music remains with the Allport collection, it is not unreasonable to imagine that as a woman of means who took pride in her musicality, his works may have been amongst new music Mary had shipped to her new home in Tasmania. A sluggish performance of *Serenade* woven with peacock cries and ringing crystal calls is the manifestation of Mary's grief and creates a spirit resonance of the fragile family glassware located in the cabinets behind.

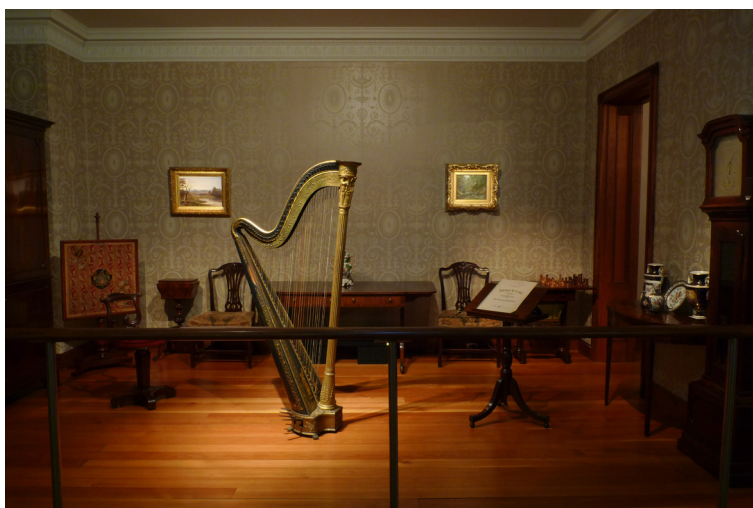


Figure 46. The 'music room' bay of the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Art.
Photo: Linda Fredheim.

Slow Serenade had initially contained a second element: a stuffed peacock, standing upon a dark wood plinth behind the harp, its tail dramatically falling to the floor as it turned its head slightly to the instrument. Close to the time of installation, the borrowed specimen became an object of contentious ownership and the loan offer was overridden with a retraction. While it would have been a highly theatrical and visually stunning intervention, the lack of any other addition to the audio allowed it to draw and hold the viewer's focus and it was generally considered a thoughtful evocation as shown by this review by Andrew Harper for the *Mercury* newspaper:

Temporal notions and presence loom large in the work of Sally Rees, who has done something emotionally powerful and even confronting by digging into the archive to find a tragedy. Her work became the central spine of *Unhoused* for me, for it was her simple evocation of a tragic loss that remade everything: the Allport is all that is left of a family history. The objects are contained, but they echo the people who once used them.⁸¹

81. Andrew Harper, 'Unhoused shines in darkness' *The Mercury: Tas Weekend Supplement*, July 9 – 10 2016.

Both works I created for this exhibition aspired to honour Gordon Allport's identity and memory by weaving something from both the immense joy and terrible, transformative grief of his mother's love; containers and release channels for a young boy's spirit. Haunted by Mary's grief, I acted as artist again in the dual role of the passive haunted persona and active Medium to exorcise this haunt and to unlock Gordon's spirit from his mother's grief thereby welcoming him into the museum where he had been forgotten.

Works and projects described in this chapter have all visually explored thought as a haunting force in both style and content. Collectively they position me, initially, as passive – both as an artist and a visual subject. I appear in the works as a figure *to whom things happen* as opposed to a figure *who makes things happen*. While the more active uses of thought-force depicted are a kind of clumsy 'testing' and rehearsal of skill, through these depictions such as the case of the *Monsterring* and *Unhoused* exhibitions, I have begun to touch on the concept of harnessing that force for useful purpose: *making things happen*.⁸² The idea of agency and intention is taken up in the next chapter.

82. In the former by depicting telekinetic force and in the latter by performing a kind of soft-exorcism through art making.

In the next magickal phase of the project, the artist/subject became a more active user and investigator of the physicality of thought. Studying and experimenting with magickal practice as a constructive and useful channel for thought-force is a relic of a pagan and more enchanted heritage, perhaps discarded too soon in the evolution to a rational existence in contemporary life.

Chapter 4: Art practice/Magickal practice

4.1 Magick and Intent

This research has drawn upon our shared rationalist (buffered) faith in the existence and power of any number of invisible, known forces such as gravity or electricity as a vehicle of conviction and draws parallels between familiar looping, repetitive structures such as prayer, mantra, wish, hypnotic suggestion, psychiatric therapy and shamanistic ritual. In addition to a search for a useful application of the thought-force it has also been a reflective mourning of the loss of the 'porous' self and was undertaken as a process of deliberate and functional re-enchantment. I embarked upon these artworks as acts of a distinctly secular shamanism but with a hope that there exists valuable lost knowledge to resurrect.

I place myself, and this research, squarely between the *X-Files* Mulder and Scully, the porous and the buffered, and chose to name myself as an *arcanum-agnostic*. I embrace my buffered self while trying to simultaneously cultivate a porous one. I identify the porous and buffered 'poles' as the positive and negative ones at either end of a battery and find the agnostic position incredibly generative as the opposing positions repel each other into action.

The animations, and other studio research, render aspiration over actuality and have, from the very earliest stages been executed to be both cathartic workings and methods to picture will.

I began with a great desire to give form to emotions and cognition, a practice that I believed to be important because despite their force, their lack of visibility seemed enough to diminish their importance in a broad Western definition of useful human endeavour. Emotion is diminished as 'unprofessional' and will is something to be deferred to whomever authorises the payroll or wields the greatest power.

While I cite the making of *Ectoplasmic* as the genesis of this project, I can trace the desire and intent to develop these works back to 2008. A sketch and a description exist in a journal from that time.

Devised while mired in the ruins of a failed trans-global art collaboration and staying in the home of the collaborators in Montreal – who had become reluctant to work and domestically hostile – I described in my journal the making of a video where a camera tracked my motions as I crawled and scrambled through their apartment in their absence, across furniture and floors, touching everything in every room and animating (much in the fashion I do now) a scrawled black cloud over my face leaving just the angry eyes exposed. I wanted to vent my rage and disappointment at those who I believed had wronged me, by 'marking' their territory through touch. In what seems a bizarre understatement now, a scrawled note in my journal under the sketches reads: *Too low-key?*

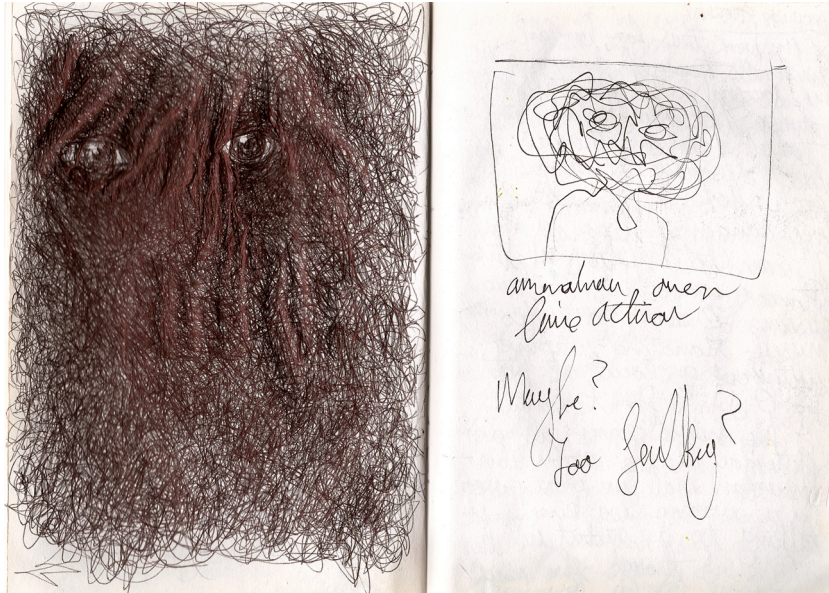


Figure 47. A double page spread from my Montreal journal showing planning sketches for the first hex

At the time, I considered the scrawling and overpainting a way of ‘ironing the invisible ink’ and bringing into the open, all the muck, dirt and bad residue of a relationship gone wrong and laying it bare. I can reflect quite clearly now that what I was also constructing was a curse. I wanted to channel what I felt was the immense power of my anger, disappointment and fear into something tangible – my wounded presence forever in their home to haunt them and a document of whatever power I might hold. I wanted to be a witch.

What I love about witchcraft is its structural and interpretive qualities and its ability to consolidate thought and intention. While the effect of this consolidation may not be immediate, it almost inevitably takes form further down the track; the consolidation of the thought being the first step in the realisation of any intent.

An excerpt from research journal dated 15 June 2015:

I have become enamoured with the figure of the witch and have started to think of the magick aspect of the project as a political and feminist action. It is my frustration with the mechanisms of governance that exist and general feelings of fatalistic powerlessness in the face of Australia's current foolish, cruel and selfish climate that occupy significant focus of my depressions and lead me to view witchcraft as a logical next step in a desire for change. It is a particularly female-identified craft and feels as useful as any other, particularly for someone like me who is keen to convert my affliction into my gift.

By 'affliction' in this passage, I referred to my own tendency (whether by mental illness or simple personality trait) to feel emotions too powerfully in my mind and body. I can now see magick as a useful discharge of the emotional energy that otherwise can make me tic, stutter or stim.

4.2 Witchcraft as political practice

I'm a political bandit
And you just don't understand it
You took my dream and canned it
It is not the way I planned it
I'm society's destructor
I'm a petrol bomb constructor
I'm a cosmic light conductor
I'm the people's debt collector

– Lyrics from 1973 Hawkwind song, *Urban Guerrilla*⁸³

While the core of this investigation is an occulted depiction of the invisible energy generated by thought and emotion, investigating magick became a way of testing the possibility of that energy's force upon physical things. Taking on the mantle of a witch has become a punk feminist action and its inherent sense of community and DIY hearkens back to a form of feminist art practice that has a long history of drawing upon traditional women's crafts and skillsets (often crafts such as knitting, embroidery or crochet) to create new form. I refer here to works such as Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–79) and Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Maintenance Art Manifesto* (1969), which recast acts of female domestic servitude.

83. Calvert/Brock, *Urban Guerilla*, audio Recording (London: United Artists, 1973).

But there are countless examples also of ‘women’s’ crafts recast, from Fiona Hall’s many knitted pieces and soap carvings, Louise Weaver’s textile-encased fauna and objects, Casey Jenkins’ knitted work *Casting Off My Womb* (2015), and Tasmanian artist Tara Badcock’s heavily sewn and upholstered body of work *Hunt, Nature, Birth* (2015). Reflecting upon the long pagan and folk roots of witchcraft, I have begun to draw on it now as a traditional form of women’s knowledge as well as a lost seat of women’s sociological power from a more porous age.

4.3 A political remedy

As Australia’s political climate has become progressively more conservative and oppressive in recent years and across the duration of this research, I have despaired over feelings of powerlessness to enact change via democratic means and concurrently have become increasingly more closely aligned with feminist thought and action. In a recent article regarding Canada’s repeal this year of a law that makes it an offence to practice (or pretend to practice) witchcraft, practicing Canadian witch Monica Bodirsky is quoted as saying:

...some people who feel terribly without power and control will gravitate towards something that offers that. It gives them a sense of being able to control their environment when otherwise they wouldn’t, so yes, you tend to see witchcraft becoming popular during times of unrest.⁸⁴

In part, this accurately describes my own investigation, where the destruction of my faith in the political means available to me, leaves me searching for ‘other ways’.

84. Courtney Shea, Q&A: Monica Bodirsky, a practising witch, on Canada’s newly repealed witchcraft ban. Toronto Life, June 22, 2017. <<http://torontolife.com/city/life/qa-monica-bodirsky-witch/>>

In the early weeks of 2016 ‘witch’ once again entered the Australian political vocabulary.⁸⁵ In January, Immigration Minister, Peter Dutton referred to political editor, Samantha Maiden as a ‘mad fucking witch’⁸⁶ in a text he mistakenly sent directly to her and in reference to her column criticising his colleague Jamie Briggs, for whom the message had been intended, regarding the sexual harassment of a younger female colleague.⁸⁷ My disgust was strengthened and validated by both Dutton’s words and Briggs unacceptable behaviour. I was further riled by other Australian political figures and the media in their insistent ‘brushing off’ of both incidents as a misplaced joke or high spirits.

It was no surprise to me that Australian women, at least online, responded with a great embrace of the terminology such as the Facebook group ‘Mad Fucking Witches’ which received in excess of four thousand ‘likes’ within 2 days of its inception⁸⁸ and instigated a hashtag movement to #putyourbroomout around the front doors and gates of the nation (with extra kudos points for getting a black cat in the photographic evidence).

85. By ‘again’ I refer here to the earlier infamous ‘ditch the witch’ signage of 2011, referring to Julia Gillard and used as a backdrop for a televised interview with then PM Tony Abbot at an anti-carbon tax rally. Brett, J. *Gillard and the Misogynists*, The Saturday Paper: The Monthly, November 2012. Accessed February 18, 2016 <<https://www.themonthly.com.au/sexism-misogyny-and-power-social-media-they-had-it-coming-judith-brett-6770>>

86. S. Medhora, *Peter Dutton apologises for calling journalist a “mad witch” in text message*. The Guardian (Australia Edition), January 4, 2016. <<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jan/04/peter-dutton-apologises-for-calling-journalist-a-mad-witch-in-text-message>>

87. M. Safi and D. Hurst, *Jamie Briggs to blame for published photo of public servant says Turnbull* The Guardian (Australia Edition), January 5, 2016. <<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jan/05/jamie-briggs-to-blame-for-published-photo-of-public-servant-says-turnbull>>

88. The *Mad Fucking Witches* Facebook Group has a membership of close to 10,000 at time of writing.

With its history of being applied to women perceived as wielding unknown power and working outside societal conventions, it seems logical to me that the word 'witch' is now a label to wear with some feminist pride. This is despite (or inversely, in celebration of) it becoming Australian political shorthand for a 'woman we cannot control' and its intent to both generate fear of the uncontrollable woman and to undermine the subject.

For me this particular incident and the social media response underscored the value of an art-magick investigation as a feminist one. An agnostic investigation of magick became necessary to ensure we do not pass over an untapped source of power that may be of value to a feminist uprising. It has occurred to me that even if magick cannot be proven to be effective through artistic means, it remains valuable as a mobilising force; rallying like-minded people's to a cause and honing one's desire and intent in the construction of a spell or sigil.

4.4 Localised art-witches: a community emerges

Throughout the course of this research there has developed a significant community of local artists working with the witch identity, which indicates the pursuit of porosity as a communication measure to be of a broad concern.



Figure 48. Phillipa Stafford, *The Stone Mother (Herself)*, Flux Project, The Unconformity, 2016

Some examples include Phillipa Stafford who uses geological specimens as crystal radios and devises magickal rituals using them to create sound-works that pull audio from the air and the earth, Sabrina Evans who pursues the identity of the witch/shaman/wise woman through costume, video and sculptural works and develops each piece in shamanistic consult and Lou Conboy who photographs herself and others in character as shamans/magickal women of the Tasmanian landscape.

We share in common a distinctly feminist stance and as native Tasmanians are closer than many to issues of environmental devastation. We are awakened to the fact that our voices are valuable, and angry enough to protest that regardless of our expressed despair, our concerns remain unaddressed.



Figure 49. Lou Conboy, *Tasmanian Renaissance Gruetta*, 2017. Inkjet print

The figure of the witch is one that venerates the natural world and can extrapolate from all the roles of womanhood – reproductive force, maternal nurturer and wise woman. She encompasses these drives with the promise of a power outside that which has fallen to us sociologically. I perceive that this suggestion of power in the face of frustration is how we have all arrived at experimentation with this identity.

4.5 Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell

(W.I.T.C.H.)

W.I.T.C.H. were a political group active primarily in New York and Chicago throughout 1968 and 1969 during feminism's second wave.

While we can only assume their work was all theatrics (there is no record that any members actually held genuine magick intent), throughout the life of the group the members used the tropes of witchcraft and occultism as a performed series of feminist protest that they referred to as ‘zaps’, placing hexes on bars, beauty pageants, university staff, Wall Street and the Chicago Transit Authority.

On the occasion of Halloween in 1969, they performed a new rite with the intent to herald in a “new, militant phase of the Chicago women's liberation movement.”⁸⁹ Robed and white-faced, they circled the Federal Building comprised of Federal courts and other government offices and chanted:

Our sister justice lies chained and tied,
We curse the ground on which she died.⁹⁰



Figure 50. W.I.T.C.H participants protesting outside a Chicago courthouse where a riot conspiracy trial is underway 1969. Image: Lee Balterman/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

89. Rik Garret, *Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell*, Occult Chicago June 19, 2012
<<http://occultchicago.blogspot.com.au/2012/06/womens-international-terrorist.html>>

90. Garret, *Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell*.

There is little record of any activity after 1970, but a group of three women re-established the Chicago chapter in 2015 as another response, it would seem, to the increasingly conservative and restrictive political climate we are moving into.

As a concept, the socialist modelling of W.I.T.C.H. might today be described as ‘open-source’, with no particular figure claiming leadership and a general enthusiasm for women anywhere to make their own actions under the banner. With its tremendous sense of fun and camaraderie, it seems to have been a useful way for women to mobilise and publicly make clear their desires and intentions. A clear intent is, in itself, a politically valuable possession.

The ‘culture’ of political protest, the visual and other artistic artefacts, is entirely parallel to that of occult practice: effigies, ritual actions that model desired outcomes and the crude poetry of slogans that mimic the simple rhyming couplets of spell-chanting akin to the ‘Double, Double Toil and Trouble’ from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*⁹¹. Political action is demonstrably a very clear parallel for magickal practice and while not yet actively pursued through the course of this research, combining political intent with magick through the conduit of artworks is a significant motivation and a ‘next stage’ of my research beyond this project.

91. It is entirely possible that the phenomena of the rhyming, poetic form of spell chanting only came into existence after Shakespeare’s witches, and not all magick practitioners choose to construct their chants so, however the ‘sing-song’ nature of the rhyming chant certainly lends itself to both memory, transgression and a sense of occasion, all of which are helpful in both protest and magick.

4.6 The Witch Hat



Figure 51. Annette Messager *Le Chapeau Sorcière* 2012. Mixed media

Within Annette Messager's 2014 retrospective *Motion/Emotion*, at the MCA, amongst many larger, grander installations I discovered a smaller, simpler work from 2012, *Le Chapeau Sorcière* (*The Witch Hat*). A simple construction of a black conical hat, and a wig suspended over an electric fan.

Le Chapeau Sorcière touches on several pertinent elements; the unseen force of air made visible by the streaming hair, the absence of trickery with all engineering clearly visible, animation in the broadest sense, a suggestion of a simple magic at work in the ordinary world and A WITCH. Immediately, I secretly adopted it as some kind of mascot, the perfect symbol of the unruly woman.

It is this representation that draws me back to consider this work time and again – the unruly woman, the unruly body and the unruly mind⁹² – here all three are clearly represented in Messenger's invisible witch.

From my encounter with this work onward, the studio research became a gradual transition from the image of the witch as mascot to the image of the witch as art-identity as I began to aspire personally ever more closely to a state of being that would exemplify these three stipulations of unruliness.

4.7 Fastwürms

Kim Kozzi and Dai Skuse, Canadian artists and practicing witches have been fusing their lives, politics and interests as the collective duo, Fastwürms since 1979. Their output began as Super-8 filmmakers steeped in DIY punk culture and has expanded to utilise installation, performance, sculpture, large public commissions and any number of dinky handicrafts like pipe-cleaner structures and crochet rugs. In Kozzi's words: We venerate vernacular style.⁹³

Fastwürms evolution is beautifully described in the promo for their 2011 retrospective at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver

DONKEY@NINJA@WITCH:

92. *The unruly woman* – the witch is immodest, highly sexual and powerful. *The unruly body* – that refuses to conform to standards of desire. This one is invisible, completely unattainable. *The unruly mind* – that makes things happen with the power of intent matched with arcane knowledge.

93. Robin Laurence, *Fastwürms play in the workshop of witches*, Georgia Straight, Vancouver's News & Entertainment Weekly. April 03, 2014. <<http://www.straight.com/article-134755/in-the-workshop-of-witches>>

They have built a practice that collides the rigour of conceptual art with pagan rituals and popular aesthetics, creating a fresh language of their own where they are alien witches who make films, video, installations, performances and teach at the University of Guelph, Ontario.⁹⁴

Kozzi and Skuse integrate their lives as environmentalists, cat-loving Wiccans⁹⁵, their interests in science fiction, pop culture and queer politics and their practice of a rich melange of media into a magickal art-language of symbology, communal experience and rite. They combine it all with humour and a kitsch pop sensibility into considerations of nature, humanity, socialism and power with a range of cape/pointy hat/pagan stylings to boggle the eye – from acid wash denim to red satin to hunters ghillie suits. Aware of the Christian-based falsehood that makes up the popular pointy-nose-and-hat image of ‘witch’, they operate theatrically in ‘witch drag’ in order to ensure we are all on the same page.

While they do not label any of their works specifically as a spell, a charm or a curse (what they are making is most definitely art) and their identity officially Wiccan⁹⁶ as opposed to their more fantastic art-identity of ‘Witch’, Fastwürm’s output pitches transformation by donning the drag in which we expect to see our witchcraft packaged and manages to convince an audience that transformation is indeed possible.

94. *FASTWÜRMS – Donky@Ninja@Witch*, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, January 2008.

<http://www.contemporaryartgallery.ca/exhibitions/fastwurms-donkyninjawitch/>

95. Wicca is a form of contemporary pagan religious practice founded in the Twentieth Century. Some (but not all) Wiccans engage in folk magick, a practice that has led to the common, but incorrect, merging of the meaning of ‘Wiccan’ and ‘Witch’.

96. The practice of Wicca can take many forms but its most consistent concern is the practice of venerating nature.



Figure 52. Fastwürms *House of Bangs* 2007 iteration. Installation view, Art Gallery of York University

In *Unisex: House of Bangs* (1999), an installation of a psychedelic salon, heavily illustrated with faceless hairdos and decorated with wigs and false moustaches, the duo offered free haircuts to visitors.

Given the significance of hair (and any other DNA containing body remnants) in the history of curse construction and hoodoo as well as the duo's stated investment in the promotion of 'witch positivity', I view it not only as a fun art hangout (as it appears to have been) and a socialist service provision but a grand gesture towards trust between the witches and the wider public. There was nothing to fear but style within that space - literal, singular transformation.

Another denim-themed installation *Blood and Swash* (2002) allows visitors to acquire (make or have made) denim patches and sharpie tattoos to the hosts or the visitor's design.



Figure 53. Fastwürms *Blood and Swash* 2007 iteration. Installation view, Art Gallery of York University



Figure 54. Fastwürms *Blood and Swash* 2007 iteration. Installation detail, Art Gallery of York University



Figure 55. Fastwürms *Tailgate Party #1: Into the Void* 2000.
Still from SD video documentation of performance

Tailgate Party #1: Into the Void (2000), was an action that took place in the Toronto street where, to the strains of the first side of Black Sabbath's *Masters of Reality* album, Kozzi and Skuse were adorned in lightweight, summer witch-drag (long shorts under white capes) and danced together in a solemn silliness before shaving the legs of two 'initiates' with sharpened axes (a repeating Fastwürms tool/motif as they are farmers as well as witches) and repeated posturing in the stage-dressed flat-tray of their truck.

A gathered crowd can be heard in the video documentation clearly enjoying the show.⁹⁷ It is a light-hearted honouring of their acolytes with a ritual of a grooming service and not unlike the behaviour of their much-venerated posse of feline familiars.

97. Fastwürms, *Tailgate Party #1: Into the Void*, YouTube video, 9 minutes 43 seconds, July 24, 2009.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x5St1cBExY>>



Figure 56. Fastwürms *Telepathacats* 2003. Stills from single channel digital video

Fastwürms investment in thought-force itself is most clearly demonstrated in the video *Telepathacats*⁹⁸ (2003) where Skuse and Kozzi are dressed in black velvet hat/cape combos and frolic with their cats in the snow. Crouching and making hand gestures that give the appearance of controlling the cats' movements by instruction, these shots are intercut with borrowed footage of a scientist and assistant operating a large mechanised piece of equipment. The white-gloved scientist gestures gently, waving the thing into position as his technician follows his direction. Their actions exercise complete control over their equipment and the juxtaposition instils confidence that Fastwürms are equally in communication with and control of their familiars.

Sally McKay described the act in an exhibition catalogue text:

The scientists in the video are goofy in their solemnity, yet they also exude confidence. They have a system, and it works. The witches' demeanour is similar. Nobody except Fastwürms could wear those funny hats and pull it off. They seem both convinced and convincing because, while they are certainly playing, they aren't just playing. Fastwürms really are witches, and they really do communicate with cats.⁹⁹

98. Fastwürms, *Telepathacats*, YouTube video, 3 minutes 20 seconds, March 02, 2007.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgU9Y6wMRJs>>

99. Sally McKay 'Nature in the Network', *Fastwürms: Donky@Ninja@Witch: A Living Retrospective*. (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 2010),84.

In all Fastwürms works, as much as the vernacular and nature, there is a veneration of the artists hand – either through the labour of intensely detailed crafting in string-art (the bat from *Blood and Swash*) and giant webs crafted from dollar store G-strings (from *Gusset Nation*, 2004) or through the gift of personal engagement through the possibility of receiving a haircut or a temporary tattoo – their projects are highly social affairs and the duo themselves highly accessible.

4.8 Alan Moore

In the 2003 documentary *The Mindscape of Alan Moore*, the UK writer and known occultist states:

There is some confusion as to what magic actually is. I think this can be cleared up if you just look at the very earliest descriptions of magic. Magic in its earliest form is often referred to as “the art”. I believe this is completely literal. I believe that magic is art and that art, whether it be writing, music, sculpture, or any other form is literally magic. Art is, like magic, the science of manipulating symbols, words, or images, to achieve changes in consciousness. The very language about magic seems to be talking as much about writing or art as it is about supernatural events. A grimoir for example, the book of spells is simply a fancy way of saying grammar. Indeed, to cast a spell, is simply to spell, to manipulate words, to change people's consciousness. And I believe that this is why an artist or writer is the closest thing in the contemporary world that you are likely to see to a Shaman.

...

In latter times I think that artists and writers have allowed themselves to be sold down the river. They have accepted the prevailing belief that art and writing are merely forms of entertainment. They're not seen as transformative forces that can change a human being; that can change a society. They are seen as simple entertainment; things with which we can fill 20 minutes, half an hour, while we're waiting to die. It's not the job of the artist to give the audience what the audience wants. If the audience knew what they needed, then they wouldn't be the audience. They would be the artists. It is the job of artists to give the audience what they need.¹⁰⁰

I posit that Alan Moore's accreditation of all artistry as magickal acts is accurate and that regardless of individual identification, the artist's hand naturally wields a magickal force.

100. *The Mindscape of Alan Moore*, film. Director: Dez Vylenz (London: Shadowsnake Films, 2008).

The artist's hand always translates thought into external manifestation and what I and Fastwürms share (besides interest in laborious craft, old movies, heavy metal and animal rights) is a willingness to be blatant about that magickal role in order to prepare the audience to *expect* change.

All art-making hinges on the creation of symbols whether in gesture, image or communication. Magickal practice extends those symbols by the practitioners focus on intent, in order to cause an affect. I would argue that artworks (the product of making) operate in the same manner as this 'intent'. In theory at least, it is this that brings about the symbols activation. In the case of an artwork it is through its realisation and the process of its creation that its symbology becomes activated. Perhaps studio practice itself is ALREADY a process of spell casting as much as political protest might also be.

It is true that the structure of my (and most other artists) studio practice greatly resembles that of spell-casting with such focus on symbology, and effigy, the defining and honing of intent, desire to trigger change and the employ of pure inspiration and chance. Moore provides a convincing argument that a side-step into magickal practice may not even be a sidestep at all, but the realisation of a true state and purpose.

The serious consideration of magickal practice has, through the course of this research, resulted in my attempt at four works with a more deliberate magickal purpose and that I specifically frame myself/my identity as that of a shaman/witch to test and to learn and these works have broken open an enormous sense of responsibility and endless questions.

4.9 Winter Incantation

In 2013, I undertook a collaboration with composer/musician Rodney Berry, for *Sound to Light 3* (curated by Jason James and Chris Norman) which was a part of the inaugural *Dark MOFO* festival.

We devised *Winter Incantation* playfully and with a spirit of good will, the incantation devised as a charm to protect the assembled audience against the cold of the impending Winter. I built a simple, HTML-coded, randomising ‘incantation generator’ that fed me lines of text from Beach Boys songs, soup recipes and knit patterns that I performed from an iPad while dressed in a naff, but dramatic, black velvet cape.

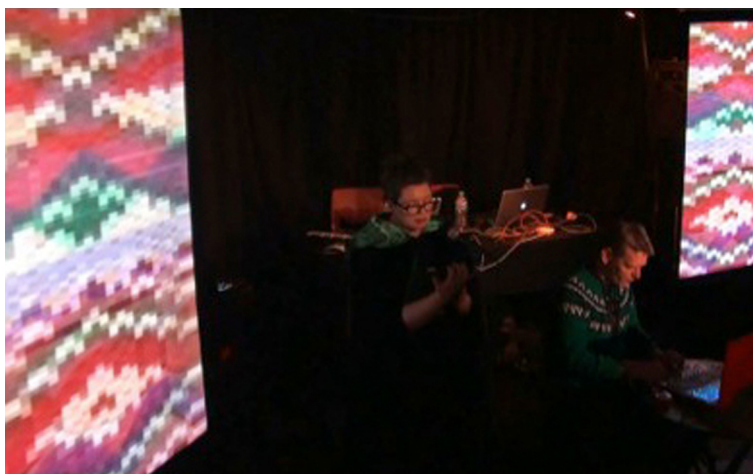


Figure 57. Rodney Berry and Sally Rees *Winter Incantation* 2013. Photo: Jason James

The generator had three levels of incantation beginning with lines of soup recipes before ramping up to include lyrics of summer and surfing and finally reaching peak incantation with knitting pattern instructions (*K2tog, k1, yo, k1, yo, k1, ssk; rep to last 3 sts, k3.*) Rod sat beside me resplendent in a fair isle patterned jumper and unpicked photographs of knitwear patterns electronically to make a sound track as the visual act of ‘unpicking’ was projected up behind us. Here the purpose was a gift of protection to our community and it was undertaken lightly.

Excerpt from research journal dated 15 June 2015:

I have wanted the work to operate as a type of metaphysical ‘charm’. To convert the thought-energy into something. To date I have been unable to focus an intent, and so the action remains largely one of catharsis and self-healing, but it remains as a goal.

4.10 HEX: the construction of curses

In 2015, I began an experiment I called *HEX*,¹⁰¹ conceived in the idea of a curse embodied and contained within a video. I spoke a curse to the camera, removed the audio to protect the ‘sanctity’ of the curse itself¹⁰² and animated something like the black cloud I imagined in Montreal, focusing the energy of my will into the marks as I worked. The hex was drawn from a number of considered intents including personal vengeance and political fury. In addition to an undisclosed desired outcome, there was here also a desire for Jungian reconciliation like the works *Grind* and *Fury Marsupial* that were at this stage, still to come.

101. While the word ‘hex’ simply means a charm or spell, it is most often applied to these processes in their darker form; a spell cast to interfere or to cause trouble.

102. Much of spell-crafting involves some power held in the secrecy of the spell being cast, whether curse, charm or other. While I did not explicitly know this at the time, it was something that I ‘felt’ in the development of the work.

To complete HEX would acknowledge my shadow self, whose intense and erratic emotions are often suppressed, and in doing so reconcile, as well as utilise, these darker, less palatable emotions.

I made an *ad-hoc* decision to use this work as an opportunity to experiment visually with colour video (my animations prior had largely been printed in black ink on white paper with colour only appearing in the overpainting) and shot the video fast, in the moment and on the fly. The small section I animated as a test was clumsy and ugly; the domestic camcorder image in crass colour, poorly framed and lit and shot against a confusing backdrop of studio detritus.



Figure 58. Single frame from *HEX* experiment 1 (unfinished work)



Figure 59. Single frame from *HEX* experiment 2 (unfinished work)

I tried replacing the black cloud with a heavy block of orange paint, again leaving eyes and mouth exposed but when I reanimated this small section again, the image resembled the coloured balaclavas of the imprisoned Russian punks, Pussy Riot, present in the news at the time. I did not want the work to be read in connection with their story.

Frustrated, I suspended the work at this point, deciding that I would need to reshoot more preparedly if I wanted to make a second attempt. In the wake of this I became nervous about constructing a curse at all. What if it was successful? How did I really feel about wreaking vengeance out of the force of rage?

I contacted fellow artist, magick-dabbler and friend Andrew Harper by email, to talk about his own work *Celluloid Curse against the Current*

Government (2004). On April 1 2015 I wrote to Harper:

I have twice (once in the course of this research and once a loooong time ago) embarked on works that are contained curses, and in both instances I have self-sabotaged their construction and balked at the final hurdle. I was stalled for a long time by my own confusion as to whether I believed my actions could affect something or whether all my work was a (permissible) fiction. I have recently settled on the position I am calling 'arcanum agnostic' which has freed me up. But I'm kind of 'haunted' by your own curse... and feel like I need to talk to you about it to understand a few things....

What follows are his pertinent and enlightening answers received, also by email the following day:

SR: To my memory, the curse itself was an afterthought to the making of the film. Would that be fair to say? I ask out of an interest in purpose, re-purpose and an objects 'itinerary'.

AH: No, it wasn't. The film was an element. Film is a sacred mixture of chemicals and light. The last shot was some paper with writing on it floating in a sink of water in the dark which said "this is a curse in celluloid against the current government may they rot". It was done over the course of a day and used elements (wood) and people (three men in similar shirts). It was largely filmed at the water works, but I knew it was a curse from the get-go.

SR: When you declared yourself to be a witch, did that only happen in the process of the curse or did the declaration happen earlier?

AH: It happened with the curse, which came first. The idea of pronouncing a text in the projection occurred about three seconds before the film screened. I became a witch then and there. I had an impulse and got up and did it. It was unplanned. I recall Kim Taylor accused me of cheating to win the contest¹⁰³ afterwards and I told her I couldn't win as I'd totally ignored the rules and had not included the mystery element. She said something in response like "what was that then?" and I said "it was a curse, I'm a witch."

SR: You're an actor and a performer and a rascal but you also have a very real interest in arcana. So, I want to define the truth of your 'witch' mantle - did/do you really, authentically believe yourself to be a witch (or possess the powers of a witch) at any or all phases of the process? Was it purely a role? Or was/is your position something closer to my own 'let's see if this works' approach?

AH: I don't see a separation between the two. Art is Magic, Magic is Art. It gets called The Art. People say really good art is supernatural. To get a public performance right you need to believe in it. When I was at Uni, doing critical theory, looking at speech acts and the idea of why things are named it struck me it was like the true name thing in Ursula le Guin's *A Wizard Of Earthsea*.

Speech acts are the power we have. Humans make words and they share really complex information with them and it's really sophisticated and amazing. Language and the written and spoken word are completely fucking incredible. We can catch and name the most complex of concepts with a sequence of words. Everything we are, good and bad, is first derived from the human ability to communicate complex ideas. We are the only living things that do this to such an extent. Where the word fails us we have Art, and art is derived of the gaps between the words.

Was it a role? Of course it was. I just decided it was. I completely believed it and felt a feral power running through my body at certain points that was unlike any other sensation I have ever known. I thought it was all real while I was doing it. I recall that well. I do not feel like that now because it was about then. Time passes and I can't expect to be the same person, but I recall it clearly.

You must recall as well by the time I got to the Ferntree performance there had been 6 prior performances that had built in intensity. The nudity turned up during the process, I felt a need to get naked to make it work. That was the process speaking to me and there was a lot of that. Before the actual performance, I protected the site by getting everyone who lived at the house to spit in my hand and mix that up with salt and using that paste, I drew my tattoo symbol on trees around perimeter.

I do not know why I did that but I felt it was the thing to do.

I was not seeing if it works though. I didn't care if it worked, it was about doing it. Saying the words and making the gestures. The magic was in the very moment of the action.

103. The Hobart Fringe Festival Super-8 competition, 2001

SR: Can you tell me anything about the people who were on the mountain with you, other than that they were hippies. How invested were they? Or were they just there for the atmosphere, nudity and refreshments?

AH: There were lots of different people there. I hadn't advertised it all that much but people knew about it, there was quite a build-up. I had some good pals there, using cameras and sound equipment, friends came to see, people who knew the people who lived there and so on. There were not that many people there but there were enough. I think some just wanted to see what was going on. Some of the people who lived there didn't go near as they thought it was black magic. I scared the crap out of them just before we kicked off by yelling I KNOW WHAT I AM DOING from another room where they did not realise I was prepping myself. I recall walking in on the guy who was going "but it is black magic?" and he was a bit shocked.

It wasn't black magic though, I had an idea that it was about non-violence and the purpose was that there'd be an emotional exchange in a way. I wanted the PM to know what it was like for the people his government were not helping.

It was a cross section and a lot of friends were there. Scot Cott(erell) was there, Joe Barrows, a few others. Dave Scully is audible in the video. I don't know how invested they were in the cursing but people were really moved by it. Some of the hippies loved it. People were all proud of me and stuff. It was very emotionally powerful. I was in tears by the end.

SR: I wonder also if you have any thoughts you're willing to share about desperation and emotion as active forces. My view of CCATCG is that it is something of an act of desperation. As logical a tactic as any to effect change in a political system that is otherwise simply not working on a civil, sociological level.

AH: It was, I think, born of frustration and anger and feeling powerless and I think feeling powerless has some play there. I felt empowered by doing it all and how long a time it took and how I had to keep going, find a way to make the whole thing. Elements of it came together really dramatically at times. The performance that occurred in Newcastle, say, was electric, and the only mate of mine there was Lachlan Conn holding the projector. He was weeping after that one. SO it came from this - yeah desperation/disempowerment space and it seemed like it was all I could do. People did respond to that idea.

I did a talk at TINA¹⁰⁴ about being a witch and I certainly was on that at that point. About words and magic. I was influenced by Alan Moore, by some reading about Austin Osman Spare (he made magic paintings), but also by Foucault.

SR: John Howard is no longer PM. Does that mean it worked?

AH: It worked for me. I can't speak for anyone else. I felt better after the whole thing was done and the ashes were in the mail.¹⁰⁵ It was all over which was sad and nice and relieving. I was not trying to hurt him. I was trying to open his eyes.

I have another ritual to perform against the Abbott government which - well I dunno. I was pissed off with Howard but this guy is something else. Still, battle not with monsters lest ye become a monster and the abyss gazes also.

But there's those children on Manus Island and I think about them.

104. *This Is Not Art*, an annual festival held in Newcastle.

105. The ongoing work concluded with Harper burning the remnants of the film and posting them to, then Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard.

4.11 Sweet Tribology

In mid 2015, I was invited to provide a collection of images for the French/Tasmanian artist Julia Drouhin's *Sweet Tribology* project. Drouhin drew together forty female artists (working in sound or image making) to develop a collection of records that would tour with Julia to *Sweet Tribology* projects around the country and internationally. I offered three untitled self-portrait images for a front cover, back cover and picture disc.

In all three I wear the traditional black, pointed and wide-brimmed hat of the popular 'witch' identity and my lower lip appears tattooed with the symbol for a witch's blessing or gift. In the first and second images my face is partially or fully obscured by the hat and in the second my breasts are squeezed (somewhat comically) into the frame. In the disc image I look down upon the camera and my breasts lactate swirls of milk, chocolate from one breast, strawberry from the other.



Figure 60. *Sweet Tribology* images from left to right: front cover, reverse and picture disc 2015. Vinyl record packaging and picture disc

These images were, like the *Winter Incantation*, intended as a form of generalised charm or a protection blessing for the forty women participating; translated somewhat literally in image into a 'sweet' nourishment for my 'tribe' and offered in the most maternal fashion.

4.12 The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning

It was late 2015 when I decided it would be timely to invest more heavily in magickal practice rather than simply adopting its tropes. The opportunity to do so arose through an invitation to present work in the exhibition *Gratis* (curated by Sam Johnstone) for which I opened up a modest magick workshop in The Plimsoll Gallery.



Figure 61. Instagram post of the GS workstation 2016

The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning was an optimistic experiment in magick. The continuing goal of the work is to summon the performer Björk to sing in Tasmania. It involved setting up a magick research workstation, the construction and display of ritual objects, the drawing together of a coven and experimental spell casting.

The work came about as I was revisiting *The Golden Bough* as a useful source text and beginning to consider in greater depth the occulted manner in which the animations operate. When I dipped into a passage on sympathetic magick,¹⁰⁶ I began to think it was an apt description for the purpose and process of the animations produced to date, but I had never thought of them as this quite so boldly before.

I began to entertain thoughts of ‘testing’ the effects of a more deliberate, purposeful magick. While I chewed over worldly concerns I felt desperate to affect (the circumstances of asylum seekers in detention and a change of government figured largely) as the subject of such an experiment, I began to feel that it would be irresponsible to attempt L-plater spell-craft around anything too critical and so wound back to a more selfish and flippant desire – to have one of my musical idols, Björk, come and perform in Tasmania. It was important to me, as an entirely novice magick-worker, for the intent to be not beyond the realms of possibility and thanks to the current epoch of David Walsh projects such as MONA and the MOFO festivals, I believed this to be a very real prospect.

The starting point was a hand-drawn effigy – scanned, emailed from Tasmania and then given physical form a couple of months before the exhibition and escorted back from her neighbourhood in Brooklyn Heights NY by fellow artist, Robert O’Connor.

106. The simplest definition of Sympathetic Magick is of a primitive or magickal ritual that symbolically utilises objects or actions reflecting the event, thing or person over which one seeks to gain influence. The ‘voodoo doll’ being the most commonly known example.



Figure 62. *Effigy Bjork in Brooklyn Heights, NY 2016* Photo: Rob O'Conner

The effigy is structurally supported by one of his paintbrushes and cardboard from a giant, spliff-paper packet he found on the street. Once she arrived safely in Hobart I took her to the top of the mountain to see the view and collect some earth before taking her to the gallery and placing her in a protective vitrine with a small slide show of her travels nearby.



Figure 63. *Effigy Bjork atop kunanyi, Hobart 2016*



Figure 64. *The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning* 2016. Effigy Bjork installation view, Plimsoll Gallery

To assist the transition into the gallery, from civilian to magick-worker, I constructed a ritual hat based on the structure and colouration of the headpiece (designed by Maiko Takeda) that Björk wore on her *Biophilia* tour and, more recently, the *Vulnicura* album cover. I shaped the headdress in the form of a traditional witch's hat (when not in use the hat was displayed in the gallery upon a ceremonial stand).

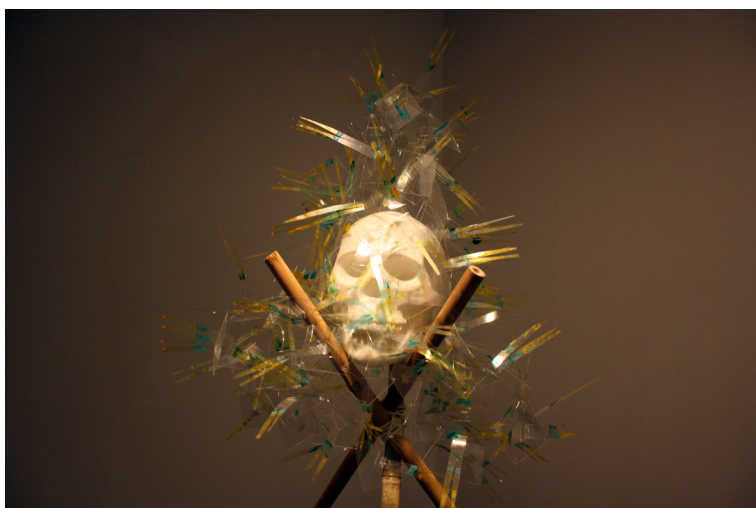


Figure 65. *The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning* 2016. Installation detail of ritual hat on its stand when not in use. Photo: Kim Taylor



Figure 66. Promotional image of Björk in original Maiko Takeda headpiece 2015.
Photo: Inez van Lamsweerde

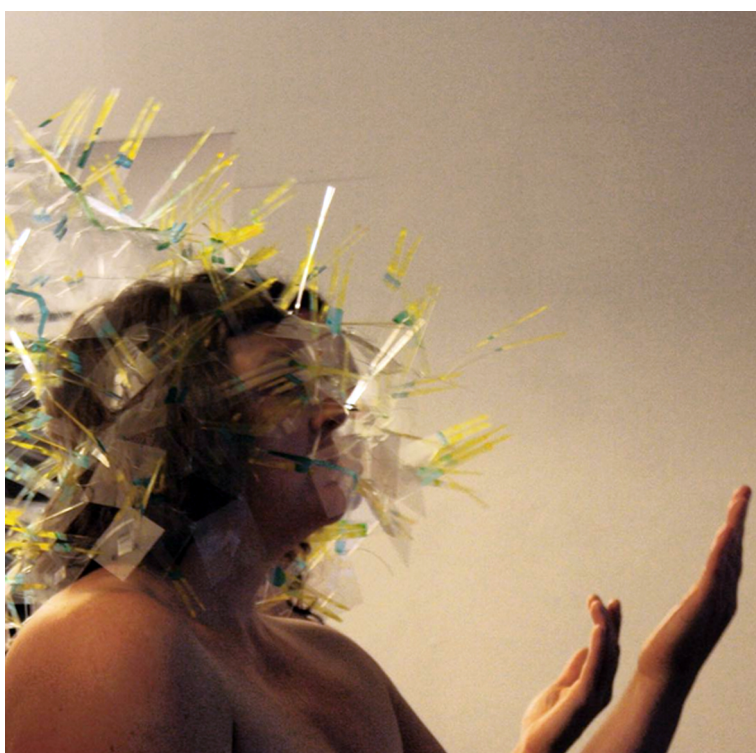


Figure 67. *The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning* 2016.
Detail of my own hat in use during spellcasting. Photo: Kim Taylor

The books that were to be studied were kept at my desk in the gallery: *The Golden Bough*, *Re/Search #13 Angry Women*, *The Magical Diaries of Aleister Crowley* and a collection of Borges short stories on the subject of mysticism. I kept a glass novelty 'palm boiler' (also sometimes known as a 'love tester') on the desk as a totemic reminder of what an invisible force can achieve.

To emphasise Björk's presence in the gallery I burned a CD of her pronouncing her own surname, *Guðmundsdóttir*, and allowed it to play on a small portable player in a repeating loop that created a mantra of her identity in the workshop area of the gallery. For those unfamiliar with the sound, I added a drawn cardboard word balloon containing the word to the wall above the player.

I formed The Guðmundsdóttir Coven, a group of local people who also held the desire to see her perform here. Together we conducted karaoke rituals and exercises in chaos magick. Each member of the coven bore a sigil (a magick symbol designed purely for the purpose of drawing Björk to Tasmania) on their palm in the form of a temporary tattoo.

I prepared and designed this sigil largely following the instructions of Jason Louv, a contemporary chaos magick practitioner and instructor. The approach was to encapsulate, carefully and effectively, the 'object of will' in text that is then broken down to an acronym.

The letters are then utilised as visual elements in the construction of the sigil, a pictorial symbol that acts as a container for the spell. The sigil is considered more powerful the more heavily abstracted the letters become from their beginnings in lingual form. The next step (as instructed) is to store the sigil away for a time, ideally until its purpose becomes disconnected from its image – in other words, at the point at which you have forgotten what you wanted when you made it.

This step, by necessity, could not be integrated as the entire artwork/spell/summoning was disruptive to the act of forgetting. Sigils are ‘charged’ and given their power through concentration applied during transformative human experience – suggestions given are orgasm, pain or meditation. Given the particular intent, I fell back on a personal art-making trope of years gone by and chose karaoke and the transformative power of group singing to charge the sigil.



Figure 68. *The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning* 2016.
The Guðmundsdóttir Covens first meeting and karaoke ritual. Photo: Kim Taylor

The coven and I concentrated on the sigil while singing a cycle of four Björk tracks: *Hyperballad*, *The Hunter*, *All Is Full Of Love* and *I Miss You*. We conducted two karaoke rituals at either end of the same day: one skyclad (nude) in a closed gallery and the other clothed and during the opening of the exhibition.

At the time leading up to the project, another couple of artist friends, Mish Meijers and Tricky Walsh had just left Björk's birthplace and cultural identifier – Iceland. On request, they knocked the glacial mud from their walking boots and brought it back in a ziplock bag.



Figure 69. *The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning* 2016.
Lighting the candle for the blended earth ritual. Photo: Sam Johnstone.

I blended it with the earth gathered from the top of our mountain in Hobart, kunanyi, and used it for a simple (and more traditional) spell.

The blended earth held a candle while another summoning sigil (the same symbol used for the karaoke rituals) was burnt in the flame as I concentrated on its image. The flame eventually scorched my fingers and the energy of that pain was used to charge the sigil, which was entirely burned away in the process. The flame was then left to burn until extinguished by the breeze. Surprisingly, as soon as I announced that intention, the breeze complied.

It was the interest, will and trust of other people that thrust *The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning* along and in many ways I simply acted as a guide. The spell-making evolved through generous accomplices located conveniently around the globe and enthusiastic local interest. This took me by surprise and has given me great pleasure and gratification.¹⁰⁷

While at the time of writing Björk has yet to perform in Tasmania, just a few months later I was bombarded with messages on social media from the coven and other interested parties saying Carriageworks in Sydney had made an announcement:

To celebrate the opening of the Björk Digital exhibition as a part of Vivid Sydney 2016, Björk will travel to Sydney to curate two nights of music at Carriageworks where she will DJ for five hours on Friday 3rd of June and Saturday 4th of June 2016.¹⁰⁸

It was suggested several times that the covens work had been successful, if slightly mis-‘aimed’, but I assured the coven by Facebook message, that the spell was still active.

107. I am forming new schemes based on these feelings. I plan to try to relinquish control more often and some mass-collaborative dreams that I have considered too difficult in the past now seem like a possibility.

108. ‘Bjork Digital Opening, Carriageworks, Sydney 2016.’ Accessed April 20, 2016. <<http://carriageworks.com.au/events/bjork-digital-opening/>>

The request was clear; Björk to perform in Tasmania. Not DJ. Not in Sydney. The effigy remains on my kitchen windowsill, mounted in the blended earths of Iceland and kunanyi, waiting for the day we achieve our desired result.

None of the workings described amongst this chapter are presented in the thesis exhibition, yet these investigations have both informed the work that came before and mark the path forward. They have allowed me to see the earlier works as a *self-directed* shamanism and the artworks themselves as sigils, affective objects constructed to exorcise (or exercise) my thought-energy. They have also laid the groundwork for an externalised working – the preparation for a future screen work that directs the effect of its agency far outward, beyond the screen and my own psyche.

Although undertaken agnostically, *The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning* was a kind of ‘coming out’ for my new ideas about art-magick-and solidified a framework for future experiments. In addition, perhaps the greatest value of the work came from the clarity I gained as to how live/action works underpin the primary focus of this research – by allowing ideas, concepts and aesthetics to be explored outside of the immense time/labour commitment of animation (2D works offer the opportunity to explore and develop style with the same liberation). This work was also developed with a tremendous sense of community and enabled me to give some greater consideration to the role of the coven and how magick operates as a political and in particular, feminist and socialist act.

Conclusion

The visual thesis comprises a suite of original, animated videos utilising a new technique that allows the construction of the work to operate simultaneously as ritual and magickal process and for the finished works to carry forth and manifest the intent of their making. They both occupy and model multiple planes of reality between the visible (the photographic, the real, the buffered) and the invisible (the constructed, the imagined, the porous) and position the artist as Medium, magician or shaman: a role that has been described by Alan Moore as inherent to creative practice.

The works utilise the emotive vehicle of animation to embody an augmented/enchanted reality onscreen that operates according to the logic of sigils: manifestations of wish or intent, strengthened through ritualised acts of will. The working processes of the studio alchemically transformed the moving image into a primed sigil with desired outcomes.

The works exhibit pulsing rhythms that quickly become familiar and register in the body. It is desirable for the audience to allow these rhythms to induce a receptive, gnostic state for the works to be most effective but they remain non-narrative and non-instructive. The cycle of the occulted act is made complete in the closure of being viewed by an audience who act as witness to the works while being entrusted to make of them what they will.

These sigils/artworks are activated through both making and viewing. The work is uncanny in all its stages from the moment of improvised performance before the camera to the automatist ritual painting of each frame, the looping, rhythmic effect upon the witnessing viewer and ultimately the conveyance of an aesthetic experience.

Exhibition design

There were problems to be solved to provide the best support to the liminal identity of these non-narrative works in the thesis installation, as well as in consideration of simple spatial and acoustic issues. The exhibitions *The Pickup Artists* and *Monsterring (and Other Thought-Forms)* were an excellent testing ground for these considerations.

For this thesis submission, some loop cycles are 'tuned out' periodically by greater periods of near-nothingness, allowing space for an aural 'chiaroscuro' to develop amongst the overall environment. All works have had their audio re-mixed in consideration of each other and will be rebalanced again in situ. *Arms for Animating Architecture* remains silent, a device that helps to leave aural space for the soundscape of the overall room.

While initially I was wary of a balance that I perceived needed to be struck between this periodic 'tuning out' and creating a disruption to the rhythms (for which there would be no formula other than trial and error), as loops were re-spaced in preparation for the gallery, it became apparent that what emerged were simply more complex rhythms, exhibiting an extended 'musicality' that enhanced the overall installation considerably.

The screens are installed with a heightened spatial and architectural awareness. Extending their purpose beyond the delivery of the video signal, screens are leaned (emphasising their 'object-ness') rather than 'hung' and projections are thrown across architectural features in ways that push them past the trope of 'wall as screen'. *AAA* spans the entry space like a gateway; the (fraternal) twins of *Parallellarhythmia* meet in a corner.

The technology essential to the communication of the artworks is utilised to further emphasise a state of being that is not one thing, nor another. The animations as sigils are the evidence of magick working but the monitor frames the results in an objective manner, becoming simply a container, if (as already described) a membranous one.

The overall installation is screen-heavy but the presence of some projections works to create a non-uniform exhibition 'texture'. To some degree this decision is practical, in so far as I am utilising SOCAs existing equipment as much as possible – an inventory heavy with projectors but light on significantly sized monitors, but additionally it allows for rhythm and pulse to be emphasised in individual works rather than in a rhythmic, repetitive placement of identical objects placed with equal spacing around the available gallery. It helps to maintain the individuality of each work.

The visual thesis

Two decoy ghosts, *Flying Horse Spirit* and *Garage Spirit* watch over the two spaces in the gallery, one a large projection thrown high that haunts the room and the other a small and low, monitor-bound and isolated image, the sole work where the presence of the human figure is implied rather than overtly visible.

Parallellarhythmia is present as a working of the thought-force remoulding time, as the same moment runs forward and back in simultaneity and parallel, effecting and affecting the figure in separate ways with catharsis and agency. The two projections are here thrown to nearly meet each other at the right angle of the walls.

Sited in view of one another, contained by their monitors and mirroring their content in differing approaches, *The Medium* and *Summonings* picture an intent to control and construct thought as a cloud form that is expelled from the body, in the former as a peaceful release after a long gathering and in the latter as a cycle of more uncomfortable ejections.

To my mind the most successful series in their contained clarity, the videos from the exhibition *Monsterring (and other thought forms)* model, in sequence, the human figure desiring to be liberated from thought (*The Optimist*), the figure succumbing to and integrating the immense power of thought (*Grind*) and the figure channelling thought to their own ends (*Zap Zap*). They track a transition in self-awareness and mark the significant shift in the research from the more passive question of *what form is the force of thought?* towards a second question of *how is this force channelled usefully?*

Zap Zap is re-edited here to extend the preliminary state of 'collection' before its energy is released. This serves to space out the piercing aural spot-effect of the eye-beams within the overall soundscape of the exhibition as well as extend the tension of the 'resting' image before release. The relentless scrape of *Grind* is also re-edited here to introduce a passive phase of animated texture and again, offer some aural space. The simple breath of *The Optimist* remains constant and keeps this corner of the installation present.

Arms for Animating Architecture is installed as a projected 'gate' as earlier described and celebrates this force discharging from the body. It is present as an icon to transform the gallery into a temple of cognition, offering an amorphous but positive blessing upon those who pass between its limbs.

This research project took up some of the esoteric influences of Surrealism, with an understanding of Surrealism as a 'psychic mechanism' (André Breton's words¹⁰⁹). Relying heavily on intuition I have, to varying degrees, made the works in the thesis according to principles of automatism and performativity. Following the logic of automatism, I have reworked imagery and invoked magick and Mediumship as a means of entering into a speculative arena in which forces of desire and wish fulfilment could be given more or less free rein.

This thesis has embraced automatism, magick and mediumship and has revived and extrapolated upon the interest held by Bretonian surrealism in esotericism as a heterodox remediation for the disappointments of conventional social function. It has cast this distinctly surrealist form of 'occulting' in a feminist mode and contributed to the field of screen works that mark out screen territory as a woman-positive space for experimental modes of performance and art-making as well as testing magick as a personal and political tool of empowerment.

109. André Breton, Richard Seaver, and Helen R. Lane. *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969) , 26.

This methodology was pursued as a negation of sociological malaise and a rejection of an overarching Western rationalism. The Surrealist influence has informed the resourcing of female intuitive potential as a repository of valuable alternative consciousness.

Questions persist around what thought is physically made up of and these may be worthwhile pursuing in harness with speculative neurological and psychological study. I have developed a curiosity in the shaping of thought itself as an additional artistic medium and investigation into hypnosis as a performance tool (as utilised in Werner Herzog's 1976 film *Heart of Glass*) may work in concert with both screen content and shamanistic intent in future works.

An increased feminist politicism and the comparison of strategies between protest and magickal intents has sparked an interest in combining these fields in singular works that utilise known mechanisms of protest (the action, the paste-up) as sigil containers for social and political change.

I remain uncertain but open to the possibilities of magick. As a result, I have become wary of what I would consider reckless and irresponsible improper use. The crafters of magick must carefully consider the way they ask for the change they desire; from the manner in which they identify any relevant individuals, to the symbology employed, to the way a request/instruction is phrased. I must wait for the certainty of my intent to become clear. This has no time frame.

I approached the research agnostically, siting myself between states and introducing an engineered porosity to counter my previously buffered existence. Formally, this is reflected in the flicker of the resulting works as their alternating states constantly shift in and out of one another and refuse to settle in any singular state other than a rhythmic one. Neither pictorial nor cinematic, the works are both solid (held within a screen or projected across structure) and gossamer (pure light).

The refusal of the artworks to resolve into a familiar form is a satisfying reflection of mental and social unrest and a gratifying suggestion of something new. The works manifest porosity in their fluid form and position the screen as a site of agency; a place of mediation between what is and what is willed. The thesis converges fields of the moving image, performativity and surrealist practice in a unique form that broadens cultural definition of the contemporary artists societal role, re-casting us as secular shamans, ushering in a new porosity.

Appendix I: Works completed during candidature

Proxigee, animated video loop (2012). Animated from salt crystals grown over the same photographic image. <https://vimeo.com/53644933>

The Medium, animated video loop (2012). Animated in watercolour over inkjet prints. <https://vimeo.com/53248626>

AAA (Arms for augmenting architecture) (2013). Dual channel animated video loops. Animated in watercolour over inkjet prints on watercolour paper. <https://vimeo.com/232195554>

Winter Incantation (2013) Live art collaboration with Rod Berry. Recitation from random incantation generator (drawn from Beach Boys lyrics, soup recipes and knitting patterns) and sonically translated knitwear.

Parallellarrhythmia (2013) Dual channel animated video loops. Animated in watercolour over inkjet prints on watercolour paper.

An Accident (2013) Live spoken word. A reworking of Beth Lisick's spoken word element of Broken Down, a live artwork by Lisick, Matt Warren and Eli Cruise in 2003.

Coffee Task (2013) Live action for three workers with coffee beans, RC car and coffee making facilities. An adaptation of a performance experiment conducted as a part of the Decay Laboratory, a performance laboratory project undertaken with Deborah Pollard and Matt Warren in late 2010, and in that instance titled *Coffee/Petal Transport Task*. Workers collect spilled beans, wash and process them to make coffee, which is then given away.

Confetti task (2013) Live action for one worker collecting spilled confetti with colour-themed soundtrack and Perspex box

Stab (2013). Music video commissioned by local band M.O.1.0. <https://vimeo.com/68985491>

The Big Head Of Sir James (2013). 3 interventions with the sculptural bust of Sir James Plimsoll, Plimsoll Gallery.

Flying Horse Spirit (2013). Animated video loop. Animated in watercolour and rubber stamps over inkjet prints. <https://vimeo.com/181354832>

Hilltop Spook (2013). Single channel video, sound. <https://vimeo.com/182348578>

Are You There, Neenish? (2014). Video collaboration with Mish Meijers. Video in three speeds and formats + disco ball and Spotify playlist.

Shivers (2014). Mirror, chandelier, rope, hardware

Garage Spirit (2014). Single channel animated video loop, sound. Animated in watercolour over inkjet prints. <https://vimeo.com/232198798>

Summonings (Various) (2014). Video diptych, sound. Animation elements in watercolour on watercolour paper. <https://vimeo.com/182333963>

Three Haunted Objects (2014). Found objects (portable analogue television, plaster bust, framed vintage print), media players

The Snowman (2014). Collaborative project with Matt Warren. Dual Channel video with sound. <https://vimeo.com/99208747>

The Mountain Eater (2015) Watercolour over inkjet print on Hahnemüle photo rag paper 100 x 85

The Optimist (2015). Single channel animated video loop, sound. Animated in watercolour over inkjet prints on watercolour paper. <https://vimeo.com/126569994>

Grind (2015). Single channel animated video loop, sound. Animated in watercolour over inkjet prints on watercolour paper. <https://vimeo.com/126569995>

Zap Zap (2015). Single channel animated video loop, sound. Animated in watercolour over inkjet prints on watercolour paper. <https://vimeo.com/126569993>

The Telekinete (2015). Hand painted inkjet print on Hahnemüle photo rag paper, framed in acrylic box. 59.4 x 42 cm

Second Sight (2015). Hand painted inkjet print on Hahnemüle photo rag paper, framed in acrylic box. 59.4 x 42 cm

Aura (pink) (2015). Hand painted inkjet print on Hahnemüle photo rag paper, framed in acrylic box. 59.4 x 42 cm

Aura (yellow) (2015). Hand painted inkjet print on Hahnemüle photo rag paper, framed in acrylic box. 59.4 x 42 cm

The Eyes We See Ghosts With (2015). Hand painted inkjet print on Hahnemüle photo rag paper, framed in acrylic box. 59.4 x 42 cm

Fury Marsupial (2015). Hand painted inkjet print on Hahnemüle photo rag paper, framed in acrylic box. 59.4 x 42 cm

Sweet Tribology (2015). Sleeve and picturedisc design for Julia Drouhin's Sweet Tribology project

The Guðmundsdóttir Summoning (2016). Gallery based action of self-education in majick, the drawing together of a coven and a series of spells conducted with the purpose of drawing musician Björk to Tasmania to perform. <https://vimeo.com/150377644>

The Rowan Reynolds Project (2016). An experimental work exploring the politics of art community. <https://sallyhasblog.wordpress.com/2016/01/12/the-rowan-reynolds-project/>

For Six Weeks I Believed I Had Heard Poor Gordon's Voice (after Mary Morten Allport) (2016). Single channel video loop with mixed media. <https://vimeo.com/181153275>

Slow Serenade for Gordon's Transation (after Elias Perish Alvars) (2016). Audio composition for museum display intervention. <https://soundcloud.com/sally-rees/slow-serenade-for-gordons-transition-after-elias-perish-elvars-2016>

Appendix II: List of publications during candidature

2016 *Unhoused*, curated by Emily Bullock. Artists, Linda Fredheim, Julie Gough, Brigita Ozolins, Sally Rees and Elissa Ritson. Allport Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania.

Exhaust, curated by Erin Sickler. Artists, Zanny Begg, Ashley Bird + Josh Foley + Gillian Marsden, Dirk de Bruyn, Nancy Mauro-Flude, Sally Golding, Laura Hindmarsh, Alicia King, Ian Milliss, James Newitt, Sally Rees (+ Rowan Reynolds), Ariana Reines, John Vella, Rehana Zaman. Contemporary Art Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania.
<http://www.contemporaryarttasmania.org/program/ex-haust-gallery-exhibition>

2015 *Monsterring (and other thoughtforms)* (solo), Bett Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania.
<http://www.bettgallery.com.au/artists/rees/monsterring/index.html>

Gratis, curated by Samuel Johnson. Artists: Matthew Bradley, Louise Haselton and Ben Leslie, Claire Lambe with Audrey Schmidt and Phebe Schmidt, Sarah Jones, Sally Rees, Lucia Usmiani. Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania

Ectoplasm, DoPA (Documents of Psychic Amateurs), Artists book commissioned by The Institute for the Science of Identity. Published by Perro Verlag Books by Artists, Mayne Island BC, Canada.

2014 *The Pickup Artists*, Mish Meijers and Sally Rees. Contemporary Art Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania <http://www.contemporaryarttasmania.org/program/the-pickup-artists>

2013 *Poets and Painters: A tribute to Dick Bett AM*. Artists: Amanda Davies, Tom Samek, Imants Tillers, Stephanie Tabram, Sue Lovegrove, Kevin Perkins, Julie Gough and Andrew Harper. Tom O'Hern, Raymond Arnold, David Keeling, Philip Wolfhagen, Patrick Hall, Michael Schlitz, Patrick Grieve, Irene Briant, Jonathan Kimberley, Joel Crosswell and Nancy Mauro-Flude, Barbie Kjar, Sally Rees, Amber Koroluk-Stephenson, Alexander Okenyo and Heather B Swann, Troy Ruffels, Peter James Smith, Helen Wright, Jane Burton, Ian Bonde, Tim Burns, Richard Wastell, Rob O'Connor, Pat Brassington. Bett Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania
http://www.bettgallery.com.au/artists/poets_painters/pandpindex.html

Sound to Light: Crossing Borders, curated by Jason James and Chris Norman for Dark MOFO festival, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart, Tasmania and No Vacancy Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria.

The Plimsoll Inquiry, Curatorium: Lucy Bleach, Prof Ross Gibson, Emeritus Prof Jonathan Holmes, Dr Maria Kunda, Fiona Lee, Prof Nikos Papastergiadis, Dr Mary Scott, John Vella, Paul Zika, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania

2013 Ectoplasmic, (solo) 'The Window', Art Gallery of Ballarat, VIC

2012 *The French Connection*, curated by Amie Oliver. Artists: Brian Kreydatus, Chuck Scalin, Dean Dass, Diana Seeholzer, Elisabeth Flynn-Chapman, Hafis Bertschinger, Irene Barberis, Lia Cook, Lisa Tubach, Maria Miranda, Marinda Du Toit, Mark Baldridge, Michael Pinsky, Niloofar Rahnama, Norie Neumark, Reni Gower, Sally Rees, Sandra Gil, Yvette Watt. Artspace, Richmond, VA, USA thefrenchconnection2012.blogspot.com.au/

Touchy Feely, curated by Pip Stafford & Amy Spiers. Artists: CWA CBD Branch, John Dobbins, Elizabeth Dunn, Jason James, Nancy Mauro-Flude, Pip O'Brien, Sally Rees, Sarah Rodigari, Catherine Ryan, Lara Thoms, Elizabeth Woods. Inflight Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania. <http://touchyfeelyhobart.tumblr.com/>

The Medium (solo), Bett Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania.

<http://www.bettgallery.com.au/artists/rees/medium/mediumindex.html>

Appendix III: TV and Filmography

Ace of Wands. (1970). [television series] Directed by T. Preston and P. Lonsdale. U.K.: Thames Television.

The Alphabet. (1968). [film] Directed by D. Lynch.

Anchors Aweigh. (1945). [film] Directed by G. Sidney. U.S.: MGM.

Artemis 81. (1981). [television series] Directed by A. Reid. U.K.: BBC.

Blood Clock. (2005). [video] Directed by Fastwürms. Canada:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsNDYPzXuy4>.

Carrie. (1976). [film] Directed by B. De Palma. U.S.: United Artists.

The Changes. (1975). [television series] Directed by J. Prowse. U.K.: BBC.

Children of the Stones. (1977). [television series] Directed by P. Graham Scott. U.K.: HTV.

The Dance of Reality/La Danza de la Realidad. (2013). [film] Directed by A. Jodorowsky.
Chile/France: Caméra One/Le Soleil Films.

Dr. Katz Professional Therapist. (1995). [television series] Directed by J. Katz and T. Snyder. U.S.: HBO Downtown Productions.

Emak-Bakia. (1926). [film] Directed by M. Ray.

Escape Into Night. (1972). [television series] Directed by R. Bramall. U.K.: ITV.

Free Radicals. (1979). [film] Directed by L. Lye. U.S.

Fritz the Cat. (1972). [film] Directed by R. Bakshi. Steve Krantz Productions.

The Garden of Earthly Delights. (1980). [film] Directed by S. Brakhage. U.S.

Ghost Dance. (1984). [film] Directed by K. McMullen. U.K.: Channel 4 Films.

Gothic. (1986). [film] Directed by K. Russell. U.K.: Virgin Vision.

The Grandmother. (1970). [film] Directed by D. Lynch.

Heart of Glass/Herz aus Glas. (1976). [film] Directed by W. Herzog. West Germany: Werner Herzog Filmproduktion.

The Holy Mountain/La Montaña Sagrada. (1973). [film] Directed by A. Jodorowsky. Mexico: ABKCO Films.

Inferno. (1980). [film] Directed by D. Argento. Italy: Produzioni Intersound.

Invocation of my Demon Brother. (1969). [film] Directed by K. Anger. U.S.

Look Around You. (2002). [television series] Created by R. Popper and P. Serafinowicz. Directed by , T. Kirkby. U.K.: Talkback Productions.

Lord of the Rings. (1978). [film] Directed by R. Bakshi. U.S.: Fantasy Films.

Lucifer Rising. (1972). [film] Directed by K. Anger. U.K/U.S.

Mary Poppins. (1964). [film] Directed by R. Stevenson. U.S.: Walt Disney Productions.

Meshes of the Afternoon. (1943). [film] Directed by M. Deren and A. Hammid. U.S.

The Mindscape of Alan Moore. (2003). [film] Directed by D. Vylenz. U.S.: Shadowsnake Films.

Mothlight. (1963). [film] Directed by S. Brakhage. U.S.

Paperhouse. (1988). [film] Directed by B. Rose. U.K.: Working Title Films.

Plan 9 from Outer Space (1957) [film] Writer/Director: Ed Wood, U.S.: Valiant Pictures

Red of Tooth and Kaw. (2001). [video] Directed by Fastwürms. Canada:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkvJoOze3A4>.

Reflecting thought : Stan Brakhage. (1985). [video] Directed by J. Starr and H. Moshovitz. U.S.: KRMA-TV.

Ritual in Transfigured Time. (1946). [film] Directed by M. Deren. U.S.

Sapphire and Steel. (1979). [television series] Directed by P. Hammond. U.K.:
ATV/Central.Shadows

Shadows. (1975). [film] Various directors. U.K.: Thames Television.

Sirius Remembered. (1959). [film] Directed by S. Brakhage. U.S.

Snow White. (1933). [film] Directed by D. Fleischer. U.S.: Fleischer Studios.

Stately Mansions Did Decree. (1999). [film] Directed by S. Brakhage. U.S.

Stellar. (1993). [film] Directed by S. Brakhage. U.S.

The Stone Tape. (1972). [television series] Directed by P. Sasdy. U.K.: BBC Two.

Tailgate Party #1: Into the Void. (2000). [video] Directed by Fastwürms. Canada:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x5St1cBExY&list=PLtwgJSw6fU2Jd2zCl4upk3Lw1-0KOit8F>.

Telepathacats. (2003). [video] Directed by Fastwürms. Canada:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DB0RHVpiWc>.

The Tomorrow People. (1973). [television series] Directed by R. Price. U.K.: Thames
Television.

Tom's Midnight Garden. (1974). [television series] Directed by D. Brooking. U.K.: BBC.

Tusalava. (1929). [film] Directed by L. Lye. N.Z.

Twin Peaks: The Return. (2017). [television series] Directed by D. Lynch. U.S.: Rancho
Rosa/Partnership Production/Lynch/Frost Production.

Who Framed Roger Rabbit?. (1988). [film] Directed by R. Zemeckis. U.S.: Touchstone
Pictures.

The Wicker Man. (1973). [film] Directed by R. Hardy. U.K.: British Lion Films.

The Witch's Cradle. (1943). [film] Directed by M. Deren. U.S.

Wizards. (1977). [film] Directed by R. Bakshi. U.S.: Bakshi Productions.

Wiz Dum. (2003). [video] Directed by Fastwürms. Canada:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwis-rmczLQ&t=6s>.

The X-Files. (1993). [television series] Created by C. Carter. U.S.: Ten Thirteen
Productions.

Yellow Submarine. (1968). [film] Directed by G. Dunning. U.K.: Apple Films/King Features
Syndicate.

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proprietary reasons

Appendix V: Transcription of Annie Geard's notes on viewing *An Accident*

A woman talks about a seminal moment in her life, the thought of it going around in her head incessantly. Over and over the second when she accidentally hit a child as it darted out in front of her minuscule orange car. These things haunt the heart. A child being run over, the death of a child such a wounding insult to the soul it just can't be countenanced.

But no-one was hurt. The child bounced up, just the driver in her heart/head was scarred. The spectator - curses her, the child comforts the woman and so begins a farce. Cycle upon cycle.

This story goes around and around. Consumes. Sticks. A meme now.

A moment repeats and gets stuck on repeat. Rises like a bubble, engrosses, erodes.

By speaking it winds out, speaking in tongues, talk it out until by constantly verbalising the thing worms its way out, a mucous laden bag, gobbled out... at last. It's done.

It's gone now; we cannot undo, nor forestall the future. The spectator; predator gropes and feeds on the shell-shocked driver: takes her out into Lady Franklin dark and is desperately avoided, her bag flying out the back door as the tiny car reverses into the not-quite-there traffic, evades capture.

What is Sally doing here? Slumped in the sun, the punishing floor, the words change slightly as her story cycles through - exhaustingly through.

All afternoon, Gerrard puts up lights, Meg is critiqued, a man sits and talks to her and is happy for a private showing.

The sunlit garden frames a pained woman as she expunges the trauma. A mother propped, legs akimbo, in the window. We listen. Walk in and out. The story goes on, picks up, falls away, metamorphosis, at last it is done.

A post prandial quiet. Sometimes it takes a lifetime to talk it through, absorb a thing, live with it. Hold your own child and understand the anger a mother might have at her children crossing untrammelled on busy Augusta Rd. A broken sandal, a broken heart, kindness to a young woman leaving. Now a new life towing a night when she didn't kill a child, was sexually assaulted, drank gin, ate bagels and resolved not to drive her orange car again in case she hurt someone.

Repetition, perfect form, lovely structure, this is what it is to be human:

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